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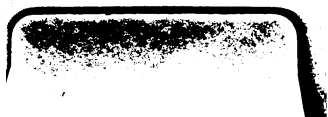


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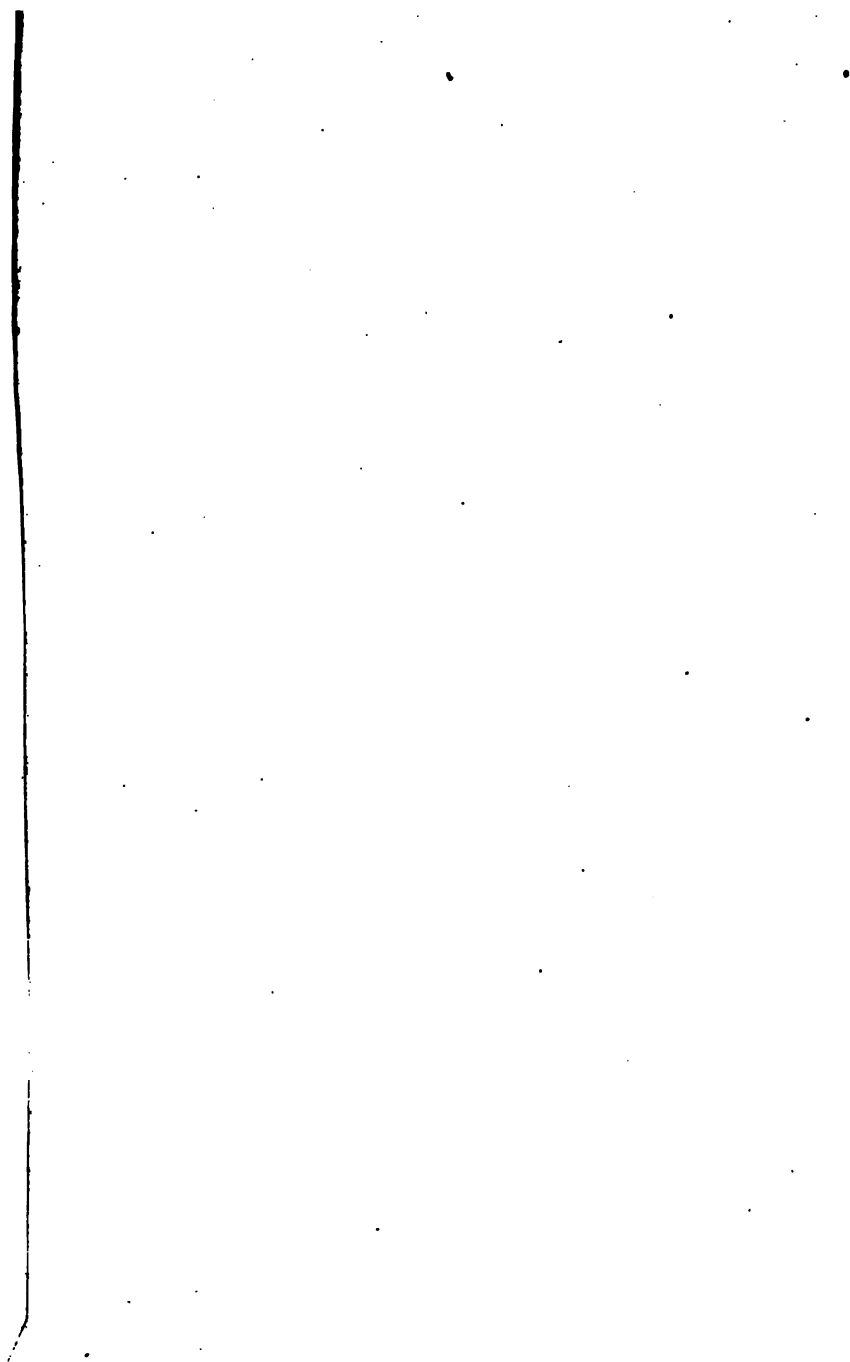
LOTTE BLAIR PARKER



To
Mr. Joseph Bowd
With Cordial regards
Lottie Blair Parson

Dup. to
Be Kept







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A Story of Some New England Folk

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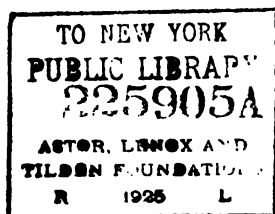
LOTTIE BLAIR PARKER

Author of the plays "Way Down East" and
"Under Southern Skies"



NEW YORK
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1909
C. K.



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HOMESPUN

CHAPTER I

THE "CHURCH LADIES" CHAT

COLUMBIA CORNERS was shaken to its center — if anything called a "corners" may be spoken of as having a center. The entire community was stirred by the news that the quarrel which had been brewing between the Tewksbury "boys" for the past twenty odd years had at last fulfilled the neighborhood prophecies and had broken forth in fury and violence.

It was the day after the particular one which fate had decreed should bring to a climax the well-known and much-discussed family differences of the Tewksburys.

The ladies comprising the foreign missions branch of the "Ladies Aid Society" of "The . . . Church" were gathered within the parlor, overflowed upon the front "stoop" and streamed out upon the grassy dooryard of their most influential member, Mrs. Anson Peabody. The little groups of chattering women, plying their charitable needles in making civilized garments for inconveniencing the heathen, seemed to fairly scintillate a volatile spirit of self-satisfaction spiced with rare and much relished excitement. The very air seemed vibrant — as if charged with thought waves of pleasurable excitement thrown into ether from the inner consciousness of those assembled. Mrs. Anson Peabody, the hostess of the afternoon, was the very top round in Columbia Corners' social ladder. In the local vernacular she was one of the "big bugs." To be stamped as one of the "social elect" by her presence as a guest in

Mrs. Peabody's house, touching elbows upon terms of familiarity with the "best ladies" of the "Corners," sent a thrill of gratification through and through the bosom of each woman present.

This pleasant sense of titillation was enhanced and, so to speak, sanctified, by the thought that they were all "Church" ladies — members not only of a church, but of one which was the temple of worship for the "leading people" of the community. The pride of each of these estimable women in her social importance here below was supplemented by the comfortable conviction that she had secured for herself an equally choice place in the world to come.

To the enjoyment of these combined spiritual and temporal advantages was added to-day the fillip, as of tabasco sauce to oysters, of discussing in all its varied bearings the most exciting event with which this usually quiet spot had been favored within the memory of the oldest inhabitant — the previous day's terrific fight between Ben and "Dan'l" Tewksbury for the possession of a long disputed few feet of land. Interest at the Corners was whetted keen. Details of the occurrence were eagerly sought and discussed, whilst speculation ran riot as to what, in the nature of things, was likely to follow.

"It beats anything I ever come acrost in all my borned days," fluttered Mrs. Elnathan Tibbitts weakly — for at least the twentieth time during the afternoon. Mrs. Tibbitts was a gentle-voiced little woman, with a round pink and white face and pale blue eyes whose expression lay curiously upon the surface. Mrs. Tibbitts' eyes gave one an odd impression of near-world-sightedness; for her, the horizon closed down within a five-mile radius of Columbia Corners.

"It was so strange!" The faded little wife of the pastor of "The . . . Church" rested her frail fingers while she indulged in a moment's retrospection. "There we were getting lilacs to beautify the church just when two of its oldest members were having an unchristian quarrel over the

possession of the ground and the very trees the lilacs grew on — such an unchristian quarrel over temporal possessions!"

Mrs. Elizabeth Pettigrew laughed as she answered, "I've noticed that most folks git into diffickwilty with their Christianity when it comes to givin' up their money er their prope'ty."

Artemesia Fitch emptied her mouth of numerous pins to ask, "Who was present when Dan'l Tewksb'ry riz his axe to strike Ben? I was so flustrated I couldn't a told to save my neck."

"Thank my stars *I* didn't git there in time," exclaimed Mrs. Tibbitts with fervor. "If I *hed* I know I'd 'a fainted 'n' fell right over into it."

"I wasn't worth a cent fer anything *myself* except to stan' an' screech!" Artemesia's tone conveyed a generous assumption of comradeship in good-for-nothingness. "It was one o' them occasions," she went on — "an I ain't afraid of admittin', if I *am* an old maid, that there *air* occasions when women folks ain't worth a pinch of salt — what's *wanted* is a reg'lar out-an'-out man! If Jestice Withersp'n hedn't got there yesterday jest when he did! — *well!* I can't think what would a-happened without the cold shivers runnin' down my spinal colyum!"

"It's bean my experience," the masterful baritone voice of the widow Lunn broke in with authority, "that you can't stop a bile from comin' to a head — an' if you *do*, you'll wisht you hedn't. Bad feelin's bean fomentin' between them famblys fer years. Now it's come to a bust-up, mebbe it'll be the best thing fer 'em all. They *say* the's always a caa'm *before* a storm an' I've noticed the's gener'ly one *afterwards*."

Having oracularly delivered herself of this bit of combined wisdom and philosophy, Mrs. Lunn began a vigorous search for the eye of her needle from which the thread, all unmindful of its duty to the heathen, had taken advantage of her harangue to make its escape.

Mrs. Elizabeth Pettigrew laughed.

Mrs. Pettigrew was enjoying herself hugely. Nothing ever afforded her quite such genuine amusement as contemplating other people's troubles and predicting the still greater possible or probable misfortunes likely to be added to them.

"What you laughin' at *now*, Mis' Pettigrew?" Mrs. Tibbitts turned her pale eyes round with mild reproof upon Mrs. Pettigrew's mirth-convulsed face. "It don't seem to *me* to be no laughin' matter!"

Mrs. Pettigrew wiped the gleeful tears from her eyes. "I was thinkin'," she chuckled, "what the Tewksb'rys'll look like by the time they *git* to that caa'm spell Mis' Lunn's a prophesyin'. If they hev any sails, er masts, er bul'arks left when the hurricane's over, I miss *my* guess!" This vivid picture of the Tewksburys in a general state of wreckage so tickled Mrs. Pettigrew that she went off into another spasm of laughter. "I s'pose you've heard," she continued, as soon as her merriment could find voice, "that they're goin' to *law now* to settle their diffickwilties!"

"Goin' to *law*!" Miss Fitch was awe-stricken.

"You *don't* say." Mrs. Lunn ceased her vain efforts to re-establish the partnership between needle and thread, pushed her spectacles upward on her forehead and gazed at Mrs. Pettigrew in amazement.

"*Elnathan* heard about that this mornin'." Mrs. Tibbitts bridled with an air of pleased importance. She was not to be eclipsed in the way of interesting information. "Mrs. Lawyer Tufts was into our store about noontime and *she* told *Elnathan* that Lawyer Tufts hed been spoke to 'bout takin' up 'o the case."

"You don't *say*!" Thread, needle and heathen were alike forgotten in the interest of this fresh development. "Wuz it *Ben* er *Dan'l* 'twas goin' to git him to go to court?"

"As to *that*, Mis' Lunn, I ain't heard," replied Mrs. Tibbitts, "but *Elnathan* says it must a' been *Dan'l*, fer the' wouldn't be any one 'round Columby Corners good enough

fer Ben! He'll hev to go to Litchfield er mebbe even to Boston to git a lawyer thet's big enough guns fer him!"

"Well, Mariar'll think so, an' that amounts to the same thing," said Miss Fitch.

"Yes," laughed Mrs. Pettigrew; "Ben's found out by this time that when Mariar puts her foot down the best thing he kin do is to git out from under."

"Mariar's jest set on bein' stylish. Everybody knows she left the Meth'dist Church and jined our'n so's she could git into the best s'ciety."

"That's so, Mis' Lunn," assented Miss Fitch, "and if it wasn't sech a ways to Belvers that she'd just about perish drivin' there in winter time, she'd leave us an' join the 'piscopals."

Mrs. Tibbitts broke in quickly, "Mariar's dead set on the 'piscopals. She thinks they're so high toned. Wouldn't wonder if she'd try t' edge in by gittin' a 'piscopal lawyer."

Mrs. Pettigrew gave a little laugh of derision. "If they reely do git a law suit into the fambly," she said, "we can't touch Mariar with a ten-foot pole, she'll think she's such punkins! She's always felt terrible stuck up 'cause they hed a bigger mor'gidge on their prope'ty than any one else round here."

Miss Fitch averred, in a cautious whisper, that she understood the mortgage was not paid off up to the present time.

"Course it ain't! 'n' what's more, it ain't likely to be, in a hurry!" joyfully responded Mrs. Pettigrew. "I haf' to laugh thinkin' how Mariar put the mor'gidge on to the farm to keep Sid agoin' to collidge. She said she was goin' to make a gentleman an' a doctor out of him an' he'd earn enough in no time to settle the mor'gidge. Well, if he's earned a quarter sence he come out the eagil onto it must be screamin' yet! There ain't no one round here'd trust him to pizen a sick cat."

"I heard,"—Mrs. Lunn bent forward to impart the information confidentially, "I heard that Mrs. Doctor Lewis said that the doctor had been told that Sid didn't never

graduate! We know he ain't never hung out no doctor sign, 'n' if he hed a diplomy Mariar would cert'nly 'a' hed it framed 'n' hung up in the parlor."

"I guess Doc Lewis heard the right's of it," whispered Mrs. Tibbitts. "Wonder if it's reely so that he's goin' to be took into the bank to keep the books?"

Mrs. Pettigrew shook with suppressed merriment.

"Guess it'll be to *keep the dust off of 'em*," she said.

"I'm afeerd, dretful afeerd"—Mrs. Lunn's voice grew dolorous with fearsome prophecy, "that Mariar Tewks-b'ry's pride'll git a ter'ble fall someday."

Mrs. Pettigrew chipped in in high glee. "Between mor'gidgin' the farm to send Sid away to collidge so's he could learn to feel reel natch'ral partin' his hair in the middle 'n' wearin' collars ev'ry day, 'n' gittin' mixed up with city lawyers into a lawsuit, I kin tell what'll happen to Mariar!—If we don't see her some day ridin' by a-settin' on top of her last feather bed, goin' over the hills to the poor house, I miss *my* guess."

"Sh!" cautioned Miss Fitch, checking the jocund Mrs. Pettigrew, "Mrs. Peabody's comin' out—be keerful!—you know she favors Sid for her Em'ly."

"I kin see what'll come o' Sid 'n' Emily gittin' married," chuckled Mrs. Pettigrew, pleasing pictures of calamity rising before her mind's eye. "They'll start out with a terrible splurge 'n' then they'll fizzle down to nothin'! Sid'll be so busy keepin' his hair parted straight into the middle 'n' changin' his collars 't he won't hev no time to work fer a livin'. By the time they git five or six childern 'n' Em'ly's all broke down, 'n' Sid's folks hes run through all their money payin' off the mor'gidge, the childern 'n' Em'ly 'n' Sid'll come back, holdin' hands, t' live on pa 'n' ma Peabody." Mrs. Pettigrew wiped away the tears of hilarity which her picture of Emily's future had brought to her eyes.

Further gossip was restrained by Mrs. Peabody's approach toward the little knot of women seated under the spreading branches of the great horse-chestnut tree.

"We've been a-missin' Em'ly," Miss Fitch made haste to remark in her best tone of polite regrets. "Ain't she goin' to be here this afternoon?"

"She went out awhile ago with her cousin, Will Hubbard. You know he's here from Litchfield making us a visit."

"We was just speakin' about Em'ly and a *certain* young man," simpered Mrs. Tibbitts, amiably. "I suppose we'll be hearin' about a weddin' 'fore long, now he's goin' to be a *banker*."

Mrs. Pettigrew said nothing, but she shook with suppressed laughter as she bent over her needle.

Mrs. Peabody, with a slight flush of consciousness, made haste to disclaim any such idea, but her tone lacked a convincing negative quality. "We're not making any plans about Emily. Of course there's no telling *what's* liable to happen — but there's no hurry about Emily's getting married — she's young yet."

"Yes, so she *is*!" assented Miss Fitch with a smothered sigh. "But I wouldn't keep harpin' on that too long," she added. "It's supprisin' how quick girls gits old — almost before you know it — 'n' the' aint much call for 'em *then*."

"The' *aint* much call for 'em if they're old maids," Mrs. Pettigrew laughed. "*Widows* don't seem to hev no difficulty. No matter how old they be — seems they kin keep right on findin' some one to marry 'em."

Two dull red spots glowed on Mrs. Lunn's massive cheeks. Did any ulterior meaning lurk behind this remark? She shot a quick glance at Mrs. Pettigrew, of which that lady appeared to be unconscious. "I *hope*, Mis' Pettigrew," she said with the faintest hint of defiance in her tone and bearing. "I *hope* you don't hev no *personal* meanin' by that speech!"

"Oh, present comp'ny's always excepted, you know," Mrs. Pettigrew replied, with an accompanying chuckle of amusement which served rather to increase Mrs. Lunn's annoyance.

Mrs. Tibbitts deftly steered the conversational bark from dangerous rocks. "If I was you, Artemishy, I'd see if I

couldn't git on the soft side o' Dan'l Tewksb'ry. He'd be a pretty good ketch."

Miss Fitch shook her head. "No, 'twouldn't be no use," she said. "When a man once gits to be a reg'lar old bach he most gen'ally stays one. He gits a shell round him like a turtle 'n' if ye try t' git near he draws hisself in 'n' ye can't find out which his soft side is — if he's *got* one at *all*."

"Ought to set your cap fer a *widower*," laughed Mrs. Pettigrew. "F'm my observations the only diffickwilty with *them* is that they ain't got nothin' *but* soft sides."

"Seems it's so," chimed in Mrs. Tibbitts, "f'm the way they let themselves git snapped up soon's they're left alone."

"Well, 'tain't so supprisin' when you come to think of it." Mrs. Lunn's large and dominating voice had a ring as of justification in it. It reelly *ain't* so supprisin'! A man thets hed a wife gits so used to bein' 'tended to, 'n' waited on, 'n' shook up, 'n' straightened out, 'n' kep' goin' 'at when he's left by himself he natch'ally misses it. He d' know which way to turn. He's jest like a ship without a rudder, a-bobbin' helpless around till some woman comes along and tows him whichever way she wants him to go."

"I wonder if old man Goslin'll be makin' up to eny one," mused Mrs. Tibbitts, pensively.

"There, Artemishy!" said Mrs. Pettigrew, with sly amusement, refraining with an effort from looking at Mrs. Lunn. "There's a chance fer you — old man Goslin's in the market!"

"I can't *think* it!" protested Mrs. Peabody; "it's only a short time since Mrs. Goslin died — and Mr. Goslin seemed to be in terrible grief!"

"It's nine months next Tuesday!" Mrs. Pettigrew chuckled as she added, "'n' Sam Goslin's jest that age when a year's 'bout the limit o' mournin'. 'Twouldn't supprise *me* if Sam cut it a leetle mite short t' make up fer the vi'lence of his first sufferin'."

"You ain't countin' on Sam's boys 'n' girls," said Miss Fitch. "I guess they'll keep the old man in nights," she concluded with conviction.

The "Church Ladies" Chat

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During this reference to "old man" Goslin, Mrs. Lunn scanned the faces of the talkers closely. If anything was being hinted at she was unable to detect it — and she bent again to her sewing, a smile of covert satisfaction hovering about her lips.

Evidently her mind harbored knowledge of some fact upon which she was dwelling with pleasure — but which she had no wish to share with her neighbors.

CHAPTER II

YOUNG LOVE; ALSO THE HEATHEN

"OLD man" Goslin as a possible candidate for matrimony had proved so engrossing a subject that the approach of a pretty slender girl, with a young man walking by her side, had been unnoticed by any of the women grouped about the horse-chestnut tree.

"Some of them are out in the yard — your mother's there, Emmy!" Honest self-reproach was in the young man's voice. "I oughtn't to have walked with you — it'll be sure to get you a scolding."

"I don't care if it does, Ned!" The girl's eyes were brimming with affection and sympathy. "Besides, you didn't walk with me, I walked with you. And there's no harm in walking with you, or talking with you, and no one shall stop me!"

They were at the gate now, at which Ned stopped in a hesitating way. "I wish I might make your mother like me — but what chance have I got? I haven't any money nor any prospect of property coming to me — as Sid has! I can't even get an education as Sid's had the means of doing. It's an awful grinding thing to be poor — and made to feel *dependent*! Emmy, it's just enough to kill anyone."

"Oh, don't, Ned, don't feel so bad!" Her voice thrilled with a yearning to comfort — but what hope was there which she could hold out to cheer him?"

"It's when I think what it means about *you* that I get most discouraged," Ned went on, "and I've made up my mind there's no chance for me at all if I stay around here."

"Ned! you're not going away?" She involuntarily put out her hands as if to hold and keep him — then remem-

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bering that they might be observed, drew them back, grasping instead of Ned the nearest picket of the gate.

"You know how we've always been badgered — Mother and Priscilla and I — between Uncle Dan'l and Uncle Ben's folks. I can't stand it much longer! As for *Sid* — well, I'll just knock his head plumb off some day, if I stay here. I've got to go! I want to make something out of myself for your sake, Emmy, and for mother's and Priscilla's sake. What can I do if I'm bound down forever to slave for Uncle Dan'l?"

"Ain't that Em'ly standin' outside the gate?" asked Mrs. Lunn, peering curiously over the rim of her spectacles.

"Yes," answered Mrs. Pettigrew. "She's been standin' there a long time talkin' to Ned Cutler."

Mrs. Peabody turned with a start, looking in the direction of the young people at the gate.

"I'm afraid *Sid*'ll be gittin' jealous," Mrs. Pettigrew continued, jovially, as if the prospect of trouble of that nature would afford her great amusement.

Mrs. Peabody, her face flushing with annoyance, called out sharply, "Emily, come here."

"Don't ever go away without telling me, Ned, without saying good-bye," the girl whispered quickly.

"No, Emmy, I won't." Turning slowly away, Ned went on down the village street, his hands thrust deep into his pockets, his head bent moodily.

The girl, winking back the tears with which her eyes were filled, came slowly inside the gate — in no hurry to face her mother's displeasure.

"Dear me, Emily, I *wish* you wouldn't dawdle at the gate with any young man who happens to come your way. I thought your cousin Will was with you."

"He was, but he went into the bank."

"Well, couldn't you have gone into the bank with him? Your father would have been glad to see you."

"I didn't care about going in, Ma." Emily's voice was sufficiently soft and conciliating and her down-drooped lids hid the rebellious gleam in her eyes.

Miss Fitch could control her curiosity no longer. "Did ye see anything o' Sid Tewksb'ry, er hear anything why his ma didn't come to sewin' circle this afternoon?"

"No," answered Emily, apathetically winding and unwinding the ribbons of her hat about her fingers.

"Ned know anything 'bout how their gittin' on at his Uncle Ben's since the fuss yisterday?" Mrs. Tibbitts inquired with lively interest.

"Nothing," Emily replied with tantalizing indifference.

"Well, now," said Mrs. Lunn, "of course he must a-hed a good deal to tell as to how his Uncle *Dan'l* is takin' the trouble."

"No, he hadn't," protested Emily, struggling to be calmly polite — then burst forth with nervous vehemence: "Oh, dear! what's the reason people quarrel, *quarrel*, *quarrel*! and if they do, what's the good of other people talking, *talking*, *talking* about it forever and *forever*!"

"Why, Emily!" expostulated her mother, amazed at such an unwonted outbreak. "What in the world has got into you? Go right into the dining-room now. I'll be there in a minute — I want you to help me and Lizzie with the tea."

The girl went obediently into the house, without a word, and Mrs. Peabody turned apologetically toward the ladies.

"I never saw Emily so irritable. I don't know what to make of it."

"Acts as if something was *worryin'* her," suggested Miss Fitch.

"Hed a fallin' out with Sid, mebbe," said Mrs. Tibbitts.

"When girls hev a fallin' out with their beaus they think they're in a peck o' trouble," said Mrs. Pettigrew, adding with a ripple of amused laughter; "they don't know how much worse troubles they'll be liable to hev if they reelly git 'em."

Mrs. Peabody straightened herself and answered with a touch of asperity: "I don't think Emily's feeling bad and I don't think she's likely to have any particular trouble now, or after she's married. She's just a little out of sorts

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—all girls have those spells. Aren't you most through with the things you're sewing? It's getting pretty near time for tea."

The ladies perceived that their hostess was, as they would have expressed it among themselves, "gittin' touchy." Even the irrepressible Mrs. Pettigrew felt that a turn in the conversation was desirable. Mrs. Peabody had a way of putting even the "Church ladies" at a distance when they became indiscreetly familiar.

Miss Fitch hastened to relieve the slight chill of the "set back" so deftly administered by Mrs. Peabody. "Yes," she chirped in a tone of cheerful satisfaction, holding up to view a suit of striped flannelette pajamas, "I've jest set the last stitch into these here pajamys 'n' I do hope they'll be a lot o' comfort to some poor heathen."

"I'm told that them pajamys has got to be all the go with the men-folks," declared Mrs. Tibbitts, "but *Elnathan* won't never wear 'em. I always make him the plain unbleached cotton night shirts."

"Do you suppose any heathen person will put those on?" queried Mrs. Peabody, regarding the pajamas somewhat dubiously. "I don't know but we're expecting too much of them to put on clothes both day *and* night."

"Well, you see, I was thinkin'," Miss Fitch explained in defense of her contribution to the missionary box, "that it's our bounden duty to educate 'em up to the idee of wearin' night clo'es. *But*, if they can't be enlightened *so fur*, they *could* wear these in the daytime — on a pinch."

"Now do you suppose the poor things reely do go nakid?" Mrs. Tibbitts asked, her shallow eyes wide with incredulity. "Of course it wouldn't be so supprisin' if they didn't put much on at night, perticklerly if the weather was kind o' warm fer the darkness 'd be a sort o' cover fer 'em, but as fer them goin' around like that in broad daylight — well, *I've* always thought the deescription was a *leetle* mite over-drawn."

"It's as trew as we're all a settin' here this minit," Mrs. Lunn asserted with such emphasis that the eyes of all

present were fixed upon her in expectancy. She certainly must have something to tell in support of her statement. "It was fust off when me an' Mr. Lunn was married," she went on, "an' we was livin' at that time over to Salem. The' was an old sailor man used to come 'n' set with Mr. Lunn quite some in the evenin's, 'n' the things that man hed seen here 'n' there round the world just beat everything! It us't to set me to thinkin', 's young 's I was then, how all them outlandish furriners 'n' heathens was to be pitied fer not livin' 'n' thinkin' accordin' to the right 'n' proper way, as we knew how to do in Massachusitts."

"Did this sailor man atchelly fall in with the heathens?" Mrs. Tibbitts questioned, with breathless interest.

"He atchelly did!" declared Mrs. Lunn. "He was a sailin' round in a big ship in some furrin ocean, 'n' 'twas ter'ble hot 'n' they was gittin' scurst o' water 'n' didn't know what they was goin' to do, when one day they spied some islands on their stabbard side — so they sailed up to 'em as clos't as they da'st fer they didn't know what islands they was ner who ner what was onto 'em. Pretty soon they seen three-four boats a-shoven' out from the shore 'n' when the boats got near enough to the ship fer the sailors to see plain, there was boats full of heathens 's nakid 's the day they was borned!"

Sundry gasps of amazement and exclamations of interest and curiosity encouraged Mrs. Lunn to continue her story.

"Well, to make a long story short," she went on, "they wouldn't let the heathens come aboard the ship fer fear they'd turn to 'n' masacree 'em; but they parley-voood around 'n' tried to make frien's with 'em, 'n' one o' the sailor men — more from fun 'n' anything else — tied a piece o' rusty salt pork on a string 'n' let it down into one o' the boats — it seems they hed five-six bar'ls o' the pork on board thet was so spiled with rust the sailors couldn't eat it — 'n' would you *b'lieve*? — them heathens jest gobbled that bit o' salt pork 'n' smacked their lips 's if 'twas Thanksgivin' turkey 'n' made the sailor men onderstand 't they wanted more. Well, the cap'n was a pretty cute man

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'n' knew a good many kinds of furrin' gibberish 'n' he managed to git it through the heathens' heads that fer ev'ry three bar'els o' drinkin' water they'd bring from the islands to the ship, he'd give 'em one bar'l o' the pork—seein' they liked it so much.

"The upshot of the matter was the sailor men got all the drinkin' water they wanted, 'n' fer extry, jest to show how much they 'preciated the pork, the heathens brung out from the islands three-four boat loads of all kinds o' fruit 't grewed there—'n' jest the las' thing"—Mrs. Lunn grew dramatically impressive, "jest as the big ship was a-sailin' away, *out* f'm shore comes *another* boat, with a lot of fuss 'n' feathers 'n' hully-ballooin' 's if it was some one o' consequence. Pretty soon it got near enough fer the sailor men to see, 'n' there in the middle o' the boat, with the other heathens a-rowin' him, wuz a man standin' up as straight 'n' proud as a king, 'n' not a rag onto him 'cept a white collar round his neck, a plug hat onto his head, 'n' holdin' a blue ruffled parasol up over 'im."

"Well, I never!" Mrs. Tibbitts' vocabulary failed utterly to meet the requirements of the occasion.

Miss Fitch sighed with genuine regret for a lost opportunity. "Poor man," she lamented. "I do *wisht* he'd a hed these pajamys."

"But all that them sailor men seen was *men*, wasn't they?" questioned Mrs. Tibbitts, still loth to give up her private convictions. "I cert'n'ly think the *women* must wear somethin'!"

"The *women* must go jest the same's the men!" Miss Fitch declared, positively. "If they didn't, they'd hunt 'round fer some sort o' material to cover up the men folks—'twouldn't take near as much as they'd hev to git fer themselves. That's one thing," she digressed, "that's always made me thankful I wasn't a man—I never could git us't to goin' around with nothin' but a pair o' pants on to disguise my laigs."

A diversion occurred just at this moment by the emerging of a portly, florid, jovial looking man from a small

office building on the opposite side of the street. The lettering upon the office window read —

JUDGE A. ITHERSPOON,
JUSTICE of the PEACE.

CHAPTER III

THE UNREGENERATE JUDGE

JUSTICE WITHERSPOON at once proceeded toward the entrance of the "Putnam House" next door but one to the building he had just quitted. He stopped to exchange a few words with one of the habitués of the hotel who sat, legs dangling, tipped back against the house in one of the big armchairs which hospitably furnished the platform extending across the hotel front. As the Justice stood, his hand resting upon the jamb of the door, his burly figure outlined within the open doorway, his jovial laugh fell, sonorous, upon the ears of his interested watchers. After his greeting to the lounge he passed on into the hotel.

"As it ain't supper time yit I *presume* he's goin' in to git a *drink*," Mrs. Lunn's tone was austerely disapproving.

"I declare!" exclaimed Miss Fitch, "if I don't think Jestice Withersp'n 'd be *reel nice* if he wasn't such an awful wicked, sinful man."

"Artemishy, I'm supprised at you!" Mrs. Tibbitts declared. "You know he plays cards, goes to see hoss-racin' 'n' opr'ys every chanst he gits, 'n' *they say* he went clear to New York onc't to see some men fight in a prize fight!"

"I guess that ain't all!" Mrs. Pettigrew's laugh was one of delicious enjoyment. "When we know *that* much we can gen'rally count on a lot *worse* that we don't never hear about. I guess the Jestice is a pretty bad egg."

"Well, I stick to jest what I said"—Miss Fitch stood manfully to her guns. "I said he'd *be nice* if it wasn't fer them scandalous doin's."

"I wish we could bring him into the Church." The

parson's little wife had been quiet for some time, but here was a subject that came near to her. "He has considerable money—he could do *so* much for us!"

"Miss Phelps, I've a mind to bone him for a counterbution to our missionary box!" declared Miss Fitch with daring resolution.

"There he is comin' out the hotel," cried Mrs. Tibbitts excitedly; "why don't you call him over now?"

Miss Fitch hesitated. "I would," she stoutly averred, "only bein' a single woman it wouldn't look jest respectable."

"Well, I'll do the callin', Artemishy, 'n' you kin' do the bonin'. I'm cur'ous to see how you'll come out." Mrs. Pettigrew chuckled as she stepped to the fence, calling "Jes-t-i-c-e! Jestice W-i-t-h-e-r-sp'n!"

The Justice turned, hearing his name called, and in answer to her beckoning finger came at once across the street.

"You callin' me, Mis' Pettigrew?" he asked, touching his hat to the assemblage of ladies.

"The's *one* thing," Miss Fitch whispered to Mrs. Tibbitts in a hurried aside, "the Jestice never fergits his etikwette."

"Yes," Mrs. Pettigrew answered Witherspoon's query. "We jest been talkin' about you, Jestice."

"Hope you been sayin' a lot of nice things!" A merry twinkle lurked in the Judge's eye.

Mrs. Pettigrew shook with suppressed laughter. "Guess we give you 's good 's you deserve," she retorted.

"I ought to git a little *more* than *that*," he argued jestingly, "from such charitable ladies as you all are."

"Well, Jedge," said Miss Fitch promptly, taking this to be her opportunity; "we'll all do consida'ble better by you next time if you'll put a counterbution into our furrin mission box."

"Why," said the Judge, with amiable surprise, "I s'posed the climate supplied about everything the heathen need."

"*We* think they need a lot o' things they ain't got an' I'm goin' to ask you"—Miss Fitch threw all the sweet per-

suasiveness of voice and manner at her command into her request—"to send somethin' out o' your overflowin' abundance that'll help to make them benighted creeters more civ'lized."

The Judge, leaning over the fence, gazed at Miss Fitch with an air of mild meditation as he gently rubbed his hand back and forth over the rounded top of one of the low wooden pickets.

"Well, Miss Fitch," he said, with pensive seriousness, "since you put it so strong I can't refuse you. 'Bout the best thing I can think of for helpin' to civilize 'em, that they ain't likely got, is some playin' cards. I got six-seven packs I can spare, seein' it's fer a good cause."

Mrs. Lunn pushed her spectacles up on her forehead and folding her arms, regarded the Justice with scandalized amazement. Mrs. Tibbitts' eyes seemed to increase to twice their normal size and became a shade paler, in her effort to take in the full enormity of the Judge's proposition.

Mrs. Pettigrew's suppressed laughter threatened disaster to hooks and eyes—if nothing more serious.

Mrs. Peabody drew herself up with as much disapproval as she thought best to display toward a Judge and a man of such ample fortune as rumor credited the Justice with possessing.

Miss Fitch's indignant splutterings were like the impotent cracklings of an inconsequent bit of fat which finds itself suddenly plunged into the fire. "Jestice Withersp'n! ain't you jest too dretful! to think o' sendin' *'playin' cards* to them poor heathens!"

"Now, Miss Fitch," went on the Judge, argumentatively, clasping his arms about the pickets of the fence as he leaned over it, "I bet you what you please they'd *like* 'em—and I do feel a leetle mite sorry for 'em if they ain't got any—but 's far as the rest of it goes, I swow, if I don't think the heathens are a dum sight better off'n the most of us."

"Now see here, Jestice," remonstrated Miss Fitch almost ready to dissolve in tears, "I believe you're jest tryin' to plague us."

"I mean every word of it, Miss Fitch," asserted the Judge, with preternatural gravity, "and you can't deny it's so. Now for instance who, I ask you, *who'd* make pajamas for *me?*"

Miss Fitch suddenly switched the pajamas into an indiscriminate roll, exclaiming with spirit as she did so: "I guess it's your own fault if you ain't got no one to make 'em fer you, 'n' we'll *excuse* you f'm your *counterbution!*"

"Now, Miss Fitch, see here!" argued the Justice, quizzically. "You've got an idee that when those heathens are converted they'll go round like saints, singin' psalms all the time, but they won't—they'll be just as wicked as civilized folks—and they'll *appreciate* them cards."

"Jestice Withersp'n, I'm glad to hev you admit that sech things *air* wicked," broke in Mrs. Lunn in her most impressive orotund. She felt that the Judge had reached a point which Miss Fitch was incapable of treating with proper severity. She went on with increasing sternness. "I was beginnin' to be afraid you didn't hev *no* conscience—er else 't hed got so dead 't you couldn't *never* feel it a-prickin' you!"

"Oh, ma'am, you don't need to worry," replied the Justice; "we ain't none of us so bad we don't have those feelin's—*sometimes.*" His voice took a plaintive downward lilt and again he rubbed the palm of one hand back and forth, back and forth, across the rounded top of the fence picket, his glance following the slow movement in a saddened way.

The faces confronting the Judge unbent, grew hopeful—their attack had been the means of touching unsuspected depths of repentant feelings in that toughened breast.

"Yes, ma'am"—continued the Judge, reflectively; "I'm willin' to admit that even such a hard old customer as *I* am has sort of longin's—occasionally—and makes resolutions to swear off and go on another tack. Why, ma'am, there ain't a single time I put up on the wrong horse that I don't vow I'll go straight off and hitch up to a Sunday School."

The awful silence which followed this remark was broken by a choking cough in which Mrs. Pettigrew was threatened with a complete separation from her breath, and the sound of the tea bell from Mrs. Peabody's dining-room.

That lady rose immediately and forcing a smile, invited the Justice with such hospitality as she could muster to "come in and have some supper."

But the Judge declined with thanks, and again touching his hat to the ladies, took his departure, giving vent to a jovial chuckle as soon as he was safely beyond hearing.

"Well, Artemishy," asked Mrs. Pettigrew, when she had dried her eyes and recovered sufficient breath to speak, "when d'you calc'late on bonin' the Jestice again?"

"It's jest what I always said," ejaculated Miss Fitch, in great disgust. "You can't change an old bach in his ways more'n you can change the everlastin' hills."

The ladies, rising, followed their hostess into the house, mingling with the other members of the society and adding to the general hubbub of conversation. There was much hustling and bustling and shaking out of skirts as they prepared to wend their way to the dining-room, the unregenerate Judge, the heathen, and all remote objects of interest embalmed and laid to rest for the time being in odors of spiced tongue, hot baked beans, scalloped oysters, soda biscuits and fragrant coffee pleasantly assailing their appreciative nostrils.

CHAPTER IV

WHAT'S MINE'S MINE!

A STRANGER, traveling along the country road which wound past the farms of the Tewksbury brothers, would have been likely, if of a poetic frame of mind, to imagine himself glimpsing a bit of Arcady; a spot where simple lives were passed in sweet content under the brooding wings of angels proclaiming peace and good will to men. Especially would he have been impressed with this aspect of the two homes on the morning of the day preceding the ladies' social gathering described in the previous chapters.

The day was a perfect one in early summer—the air glowed with pulsing, golden heat; the sky was deeply, warmly blue.

Faint ripples of sweet-scented breezes stirred the leaves of the fine old trees which cast their grateful shade over both the house of "Dan'l" and the house of Ben Tewksbury. Ben's, more pretentious than his brother's, with its haughty cupola, spreading "wing," bulging bay window and trimly kept lawn sloping to the entrance gate; Daniel's, not so lofty of stature nor spreading of base, meeker of mien, admitting itself the home of one less prosperous than his neighbor—yet with the radiance of such a garden as would more than compensate for inferior architectural glories—in the eyes of many a passing pilgrim.

Such a garden! glowing masses of old-fashioned roses; pansies, sweet William, clove pinks, mignonette; a riot of gay colors and sweet scents that might perchance carry the wayfarer back to days long past; to simple thoughts and pleasures, and old friends—long lost from the mind but wafted back to memory upon the wandering breath of clove pink and mignonette.

Back of the houses, capacious barns, well kept, spoke of prosperous harvests. Cultivated acres stretched out in every direction, their distant lines melting and swimming in the sunshine; the laborers at work upon them seemed to move about their tasks like enchanted dreamers in a mystic land.

"It is the best life," the poetic traveler would perhaps murmur softly, half in envy, reluctantly journeying onward. "Here, far from the high pressure of toiling cities, the desperate struggle for supremacy or survival, men can come nearer to the infinite—in peaceful communing with nature."

Yet that very morning, within sight of these homes which seemed to symbolize the best and most divine elements of life, the first tragedy came near to being once more enacted—once more the hand of Cain was raised against Abel.

The Tewksbury "boys," as they were still called throughout the neighborhood which had known them from infancy, were men now past middle age. The numerous acres which comprised their adjoining farms, and the homestead on the opposite side of the highway (now occupied by Ben, his wife Maria and their son "Sid"), had been bequeathed by "old man Tewksbury" to his two sons, then young men, and their elder sister, Mrs. Cutler.

The old man made what had seemed a wise and equitable division of the property. To Mrs. Cutler, who had at that time been married not quite five years, he bequeathed the homestead with the plot of land surrounding it, containing only about fifteen acres.

Mr. Cutler being at that time in business—proprietor of a general store at the "Corners"—it had seemed to Mr. Tewksbury a most suitable arrangement to leave to his daughter the homestead and to divide his considerable farming land between the two young and sturdy sons, born and bred to the tilling of the soil.

Ben and "Dan'l" continued to live in the home of their

childhood, certain portions of the farm produce finding its way to Mr. Cutler's general store by way of reimbursement for the coffee, sugar, tea and other nonhome-produced articles consumed by the "boys." They tilled their acres together and divided equally their expenses and profits. For a time all went well and the arrangement seemed to be an ideal one, but in less than two years changes began to take place which were destined to lead to most bitter and disastrous results. The first of these changes and one which at once sounded a discordant note in the family harmony, was Ben Tewksbury's marriage to the daughter of a neighboring farmer, a young woman with decided opinions which she was sure were always correct; an indomitable will to which all about her must bend, and a small dowry which had been set apart for her by her father upon her attaining her majority. This dowry gave her an added importance in the eyes of the country people, as well as in her own, and Ben Tewksbury was thought to have made a "good match."

After the marriage the young couple went to live with Mrs. Ben's parents until such time as they could build upon Ben's share of his inherited acres — although it was Mrs. Ben's opinion, which she began to express with much vigor and freedom, that she ought to be living in the homestead. As the elder son, she considered Ben the proper one to have inherited the family home. She began plainly to regard Mrs. Cutler as a usurper of what should have been her own rights. She also began to urge upon Ben the advisability of having a survey made of the farms which should exactly define the boundary of each brother's possession and insisted upon all partnership working of the land and division of profits being abandoned.

After some weeks of hesitation, with daily urging upon the part of Maria, Ben broached the subject to Daniel. Somewhat to Ben's surprise, he received the proposition in a spirit entirely friendly. After a moment's thought he had replied to Ben's statement of his own and his wife's view:

"I guess Mariar's right; it ain't a good thing fer too many folks to be mixin' in the same pie."

"Then," said Ben, much relieved, "before spring plantin' time I'll git my hunderd 'n' twenty acres surveyed off, 'n' the rest'll be yourn. One surveyin'll do the business fer both of us, 'cause what's left'll be your hunderd 'n' twenty."

"All right," assented Daniel; "go ahead 'n' git your survey."

Here the matter rested until well toward the beginning of spring. It was at this time that "Sid" was born.

In the eyes of Maria Tewksbury the boy was quite the most perfect baby in the world, a being of extra fine and choice quality, with superior claims to indulgence. She named him "Sidney," as something more suited to his ultra fine make-up than the common "John," "Henry" or "Edward" used to designate the ordinary people of her acquaintance. Almost from the time of his birth she declared at frequent intervals, with haughty determination: "My Sid ain't goin' to be no common farmer; he'll be a gentleman! He's goin' to go to collidge 'n' learn doctorin', or lawin', or preachin'—I don't care which, so *long's* it's a genteel *perfection*."

As soon as the young mother was sufficiently recovered from her illness, she began to take short drives about the neighborhood, holding the well wrapped-up babe within her arms, with an air of great importance. In passing the old homestead of the Tewksbury's she invariably held the child up to face the coveted home, voicing her dissatisfaction—"that's where you ought to 'a' been born—that's the house that ought to 'a' come to Ben Tewksb'ry's boy!" Upon one of these occasions a pleasant intervention gave an agreeable turn to her thoughts. A surveyor whose services had been bespoken by Ben soon after his talk with Daniel, began marking the exact extent and direction of the boundary lines defining her husband's share of the farm.

The entire section of what was supposed to be two hundred and forty acres lay along the highway and across

from the homestead. According to the specific terms of old Mr. Tewksbury's will the east one hundred and twenty acres were to go to Ben and the west one hundred and twenty acres to Daniel.

A private road about eighteen feet wide, which was known far and near as "Lilac Lane," crossed the section from north to south and up to the time of Mrs. Ben's strenuous insistence upon a survey had been practically accepted as the central line of division between the two parcels of land. If any formulated thought had been given expression in regard to the matter it would have voiced a general belief that the brothers, owning each to the middle of the lane from his respective side, would both continue to use it as a convenience in common in carrying on the work of the farms.

It was, therefore, with feelings in the nature of a pleasant shock that Mrs. Ben Tewksbury observed the surveyor driving stakes well beyond the western side of the lane, thus throwing it entirely upon her husband's share of the property.

"Hold up, Ben," she exclaimed in subdued excitement, with a quick, restraining jerk upon the reins. "D'ye see where he's a-puttin' them stakes?"

"I swan — what's he mean!" exclaimed Ben.

Daniel, leaning over the rail fence watching the surveyor, looked up as Ben drew rein with a loud "whoa!"

"Mornin'," he said, laconically, then fell again to watching the driving of the stakes.

"I say there!" shouted Ben across the fields to the surveyor, "sure you ain't makin' a mistake 'bout where you're puttin' that there line?"

"Mistake?" the surveyor called back; "ever hear of my making a mistake? Guess you'll find it all right!" and went on with the work.

"Well, I swan; it's *supprizin'*," ejaculated Ben, avoiding a direct look at his brother.

Daniel lifted himself from the fence upon which he had been lounging. To east and west, as far as his glance

could carry, he gazed reflectively, then his eyes dwelt again upon the driven stakes of the new boundary line.

"Yes," he answered slowly, "'tis supprizin'!"

Mrs Ben was exultant. "Guess *now*, Ben, you re'lize I hed sense when I was bound to hev a survey," she burst forth. "Soon's you can set about it you'd best put up a fence along the line." Turning to Daniel, she continued: "You know the sayin', 'Good fences makes good neighbors.'"

"Well," he drawled in answer, squinting one eye along the prospective fence line, "it'll be a long fence. There's plenty o' chance fer makin' bad neighbors 'fore it's done." With this, he turned on his heel, and crossing the road went on to the big barns back of the old homestead.

With a touch of the whip and a resounding "git-ap there!" Ben set his horse jogging onward. "Seems to me Dan'l's sort o' crusty," he said. "I'm afraid he don't like the idea of my havin' the lane."

"If he don't like it, he'll have to lump it," retorted his wife with asperity. "You've got to look out for your own int'rests, 'n' for *Sid's* int'rests, whether other folks is suited or whether they ain't."

"The new line" between the Tewksbury "boys'" farms excited the usual lively interest in small personal affairs which is felt in most, if not all rural communities; but beyond this nothing was said. Both brothers were quiescent for a period of two weeks. Then Ben drove over to Mrs. Cutler's to see Daniel.

"I come over to see you," he said; "I just got this here bill from the surveyor"—he fumbled in his pocket, pulling out the bill and passing it across the table. "Thought I'd best fetch it over first thing."

Daniel glanced at the face of the bill, turned it over and looked at the back. "H'm," was his only comment, as he passed the paper back to Ben. There followed an uncomfortable silence which Daniel seemed in no wise inclined to break. Ben fidgeted in his chair, cleared his throat several times, and then rose as if to go.

"Well," he said, "if you can spare the money I guess we'd best pay it right up."

"What hev I got to do with it?" questioned Daniel.

"Why," flustered Ben, dumbfounded, "I s'pose 'twas understood you was to pay your half of it!"

"What fer?" questioned Daniel, calmly.

"Why, fer surveyin' off your farm!"

"I ain't hed no farm surveyed."

"When I've hed mine surveyed off, what's left is yourn. 'Ain't that the same as havin' yourn surveyed off too, an' hadn't you ought to pay half fer it?" Ben was getting excited and angry as well.

"Can't eg-zackly see as I ought 'o," Daniel retorted, doggedly.

"Then you ain't goin' to pay for your part o' the survey?"

"When I hev my part surveyed I'll pay fer it. You know we ain't doin' no more partnership business."

Immediately upon Ben's return home he reported "Dan'l's" attitude and the conversation that had passed between them to his better half.

"Well," she said, her lips setting with grim determination, "that *settles* Dan'l Tewksb'ry an' *us*!"

CHAPTER V

UPSETS AND CHANGES

Not many days after the one upon which Mrs. Ben issued her ultimatum two men were observed very busily employed upon the west portion of the Tewksbury acres.

The curious neighbors soon espied a surveyor's standard and other implements and the news spread quickly that Daniel Tewksbury was not satisfied with the dividing line set by Ben's surveyor and had employed someone else to officially declare his own boundaries. Beyond an occasional remark, as, "o' course it's as much as to say that Ben *ain't honest*"; or "it's his own money, the' ain't no one to hender him from spendin' it as foolish as he likes," uttered in a tone of injured yet lofty tolerance, both Ben and his wife professed a sublime disregard of Daniel's action.

As the surveyor reached the line of separation which had been marked as the western boundary of the east section he was observed to pause irresolutely and an earnest conversation with his helper ensued; after which the helper trudged across fields, returning, after an interval, accompanied by Daniel Tewksbury. There followed another consultation, longer and apparently more serious than the previous one. Then, although it was early in the day and their task not yet completed, the surveyor and his helper, gathering up their implements, took their departure, whilst Daniel, with his usual slow and heavy tread, plodded back to the barn, where he went on with his interrupted work, vouchsafing no information to anyone.

Mrs. "Asy" Lunn, then recently moved into the neighborhood and not yet in the ranks of the widowed, was passing at the time. Considering the movements of the

men significant, she "dropped in" to report what she had seen to Mrs. Ben.

That lady tossed her head high, with a sniff of gratification. "Guess Dan'l's found out that *our* survey was right 'n' he's on'y makin' himself redick'lous," she exclaimed. "Guess he'll shet up now fer good!"

Mrs. Ben was rudely shaken out of her state of self-satisfaction by the reappearance of the surveyor, with his helper and all his paraphernalia, on the second day following his abrupt going away.

To the mystification of every one except, of course, Daniel, who kept his own counsel, the work was begun over again from the starting point. The men went over the ground with evident great carefulness. In due time they again reached the line staked by Ben's surveyor. Again they paused, again Daniel was sent for; again there was an earnest consultation; then the men resumed their work, going on past the lane, stopping upon its east side, then coming down, driving their stakes, thus throwing the entire width of the lane over upon Daniel's west one hundred and twenty acres.

The line was not finished without protest, however. The proverbial little birds must have carried the news, so quickly did it circulate. Ben Tewksbury, roused to a high pitch of excitement, was not long in making his appearance.

"I say! look here, you, Dan'l Tewksb'ry," he shouted from the roadside, with angry gesticulation; "what's the meanin' o' this, I'd like to know?"

"Kind o' looks as if it means that you 'n' Mariar'll have to put off makin' that line fence," retorted Daniel, with dogged defiance.

"Well, we'll see whether we will or not! The's one thing—if *we* don't put none up, you kin be dod-blasted sure *you* won't put none up neither!"

With this fiery threat, his face flaming with rage, Ben went home to talk the matter over with Maria and decide upon what steps should be taken to restrain "Dan'l" from

encroaching upon the lane which they now looked upon as unquestionably their own property.

The quarrel which was to make Lilac Lane celebrated locally was now fairly started and it continued, growing stronger and more bitter with each succeeding day. Spring came, with its ploughing and seeding times. Threats flew thick and fast from one side to the other, forbidding "trespass" upon the disputed ground, and the intention of taking forcible possession was declared loudly and often first by one and then by the other of the brothers. Over the ownership of this little strip of land, these two, born of the same mother, reared in brotherly love under the same roof, playmates, companions, friends throughout their youth, wrangled in sullen bitterness and mutual, growing hatred; savage recriminations were heaped upon each other's heads; each openly accused the other of intent to cheat, swindle, and rob; the voice of Maria Tewksbury rose loud and insistent, proclaiming the wicked greed of Dan'l, to say nothing of his "turrible cheek" in setting up a claim to what "cert'nly was Ben's prope'ty without a shadder o' doubt."

The second spring came and went; the second harvest ripened and was gathered; the lane was still the cause of wordy war, though the double line of surveyor's stakes were yet unmolested.

Meantime, other surveys had proved the correctness of each of these lines and a final one of the entire section revealed the fact that it fell short of the full two hundred and forty acres by just the matter of Lilac Lane.

Justice Witherspoon at this point advised what seemed the only sensible thing to be done—an equal division of the lane. Mrs. Ben Tewksbury was the first to speak in answer to this idea as broached by the Justice.

"Ben's the oldest son," she declared. "He was spoke of first in his father's will, 'n' he was the first to survey off his hunderd 'n' twenty acres. He was first to git the lane 'n' with *my* consent he'll never give up a foot of it to that graspin' Dan'l Tewksb'ry."

Upon hearing which Daniel promptly retorted that he had "as much right to a full hunderd 'n' twenty acres as Ben had," and that so long as he was to "draw a breath" he'd "never give up one inch of his land to Mariar Tewksb'ry."

It was at this time, when "Sid" was not yet two years of age, a second child was born to Mr. and Mrs. Cutler. They had long wished for a son, and now when their daughter was in her ninth year, their wish was granted. But by that curious dispensation which seems to balance a loss by some good fortune or unexpected happiness, or follows closely upon the heels of accomplished hopes with sudden sorrow or misfortune, so the joy of the Cutler's in the coming of the first-born son was chilled by the dark approach of business disaster.

Unfortunately, as time passed, Mr. Cutler had not prospered. He was a gentle-natured man, somewhat visionary, with an imperfect inventive faculty inherited from his father. Like his father, he was always, as the neighbors said, "tinkering" at something. But the inventions enthusiastically begun were one after another abandoned — they could never be made to quite "work."

In keeping with this unpractical bent of mind went a vast amount of confidence in humanity in general and his immediate acquaintance and customers in particular. He was generous to a fault and his large faith in humanity was matched only by his small appreciation of the value of a penny and of many other details necessary to the success of a man in business.

Bad debts, money loaned without security, and a loose-jointed, shambling method of carrying on the dealings in his village store had finally brought him into great pecuniary straits. The last straw — which broke an already weakened financial back bone — was a note signed for a friend, whose friendship proved a bad asset when the note became due.

Such goods as were left in the general store were sold at auction and the balance of funds to meet Mr. Cutler's

indebtedness was raised by a mortgage upon the homestead. It was here that Mrs. Ben Tewksbury's dowry became an active factor in shaping the future of the three branches of the family. She had, as we know, cast covetous eyes upon the old home ever since her marriage to Ben, and now she inwardly rejoiced at the opportunity of securing a claim upon it — which she felt sure Mr. Cutler would never be able to liquidate. From the signing of the mortgage she assumed an air of proprietorship galling to the Cutlers, and furnishing food for characteristic comments by the neighbors. The passage of time showed but too clearly that Mrs. Ben had reckoned sagaciously and her pretenses soon began to be looked upon as neither ridiculous nor impossible.

Ill luck, being once started on the trail of an individual, or a family, seems often to dog their steps with the persistence of a personal enmity, devising, as it were, one misfortune after another to crush down and destroy the prey it has marked for its own. So it seemed to be with the Cutler family. Following close upon his failure in business Mr. Cutler, weakened physically and mentally by worry and disappointment, contracted a heavy cold which brought on a lingering and, in the end, fatal illness.

A second mortgage — the money again furnished by Mrs. Ben — was necessitated to defray the expenses of a long sickness. So when the day came upon which Mrs. Cutler bade a last earthly good-bye to her unfortunate, yet dearly loved companion, she found herself with two young children to be provided for; her inheritance mortgaged to its probable market value; destitute of money, or resources; without the necessary means to even lay away her beloved dead in the seemly and respectful fashion dictated by wifely affection.

At the passing over of Ben and Daniel's mother their father had purchased in an ornately designed and expensive cemetery several miles distant from the "Corners," a section of ground just large enough to "commodate two" — as he expressed it.

It was suggested to Mr. Tewksbury at the time of his purchase that the proper thing for him to do, as a man of means and repute in the county, was to purchase a "family plot" and erect a "family monument" in the middle of it; but on this subject Mr. Tewksbury had opinions of his own.

"No," said he, "I don't care 'bout nothin' like that, jest fer the style of hevin' my name onto the bottom of a big monument. Mother 'n' me, we've lived side by side fer a good many year 'n' I guess we'll feel more sort o' contented like layin' side by side while we're waitin' fer the trumpet to call us up fer judgment day; but ez fer the rest o' the fambly, nat'chelly the childern'll all git married, 'n' they'll rest more agreeabler 'n' pleasanter t'gether in their own plots. Jest now the' ain't no sign but what they're puffec'ly well 'n' sound 'n' the' ain't no use o' tyin' up money in somethin' that ain't goin' to be of no immejet advantage to 'em."

So when Mr. Cutler passed from this earthly sphere no place was provided in advance for his interment. The widow being without money or resources could only appeal to her brothers to provide the necessary means and divide the expenses between them. Daniel agreed to furnish half the necessary funds. What Ben might have done, if left to himself, could only be conjectured, for Mrs. Ben decided the matter.

"Ben shan't give a dollar," she declared. "He's got a wife 'n' child to look out fer 'n' I'd like to know what *we're* goin' to come to if he's got to put his hand in his pocket fer all his poor relations 'n' relations by marriage! Dan'l ain't got chick ner child to look out fer — 'n' he's been livin' there years enough — *I* say it's *his* place to pervide the buryin' plot 'n' pay the hull cost of everything."

Whereupon Daniel, to whom his sister-in-law's utterances were as red rags flaunted before a bull, declared that more than half he would not pay and he guessed "if the truth was known Ben had made enough out of the deal in takin' up the mor'gidge to pay fer the hull thing himself."

Mrs. Cutler was the grain of wheat ground between two

stones. In this friction of obstinate and narrow natures the laceration of her feelings was not taken into account. Neither brother would recede from the position he had taken and as a result of the clash of wills, Mr. Cutler's remains were interred in Lilac Lane, well on towards its end farthest from the highway.

It had been a somewhat common practice in former years for the owner of a farm to bury the family dead upon his own acres but the practice had been almost entirely discontinued. The return to a nearly obsolete custom, and the reason for it in Mr. Cutler's case, furnished gossip for the neighborhood for a lengthy period and was a source of great, though concealed, pain and mortification to the gentle and sorrow-stricken Mrs. Cutler.

The first and larger of the mortgages held by Mrs. Ben had been due for some time — even the interest upon both mortgages was in arrears, but owing to Mr. Cutler's critical condition Mrs. Ben had refrained from pressing matters. No time was lost now in going through such business details as were necessary to put Mrs. Ben in possession of the homestead. Of necessity, Mrs. Cutler, Priscilla and Ned were to remain as members of the household; but "Dan'l" was bluntly told that his room was better than his company. Without waiting for this, however, he had begun to pack his belongings preparatory to taking his departure. Mrs. Ben looked upon his going as a signal victory for herself over her most stubborn opponent.

The bread of dependence is seldom sweet, and in the years to follow, Mrs. Cutler, Priscilla and Ned often found it exceedingly bitter and hard to swallow. Mrs. Ben Tewksbury regarded them as so many thorns in the flesh, trials thrust upon her which she could find no way of casting off — although she pressed Mrs. Cutler to the limit of her strength in the daily work of her household.

Mrs. Ben was a woman born to rule. As her friends expressed it—"Mariar always carries things with a high hand"; according to them her husband, Ben, was "right under her thumb." Her dominion was a small one but her

sway was almost absolute within it — the only disputants of her authority being the small Priscilla and Ned.

Mrs. Cutler, sweet and yielding by nature and broken by trouble, never attempted to cross wills with the imperious new mistress of the house which had so long been her own; but Priscilla and Ned with independence born of the blessed ignorance of childhood, often defied Mrs. Ben in her attempts at dictatorship.

A fertile source of trouble was the attitude which Mrs. Ben insisted that the Cutler children should assume toward her own boy, Sidney. He, as well as his mother, expected the Cutler children to give up their wishes, their wills, their rights and their possessions to him, upon all occasions. Priscilla and Ned, failing to recognize Sidney's sovereign right, offered doughty resistance to their cousin's exactions. Pitched battles not infrequently resulted, especially between the two boys, and the struggle for some cherished toy or for the biggest apple or stick of candy was waged with loud screams and lamentations, puny kickings and juvenile fisticuffs.

Mrs. Tewksbury always censured Priscilla and Ned for these disturbances and visited her displeasure upon Mrs. Cutler as well as upon the children. "You ought to make 'em onderstand that it's their *place* t' give up t' Sid," she would declare to Mrs. Cutler. "They're in *Sid's house*, 'n' it's Sid's pa pays fer everythin' they've got."

"The children's too young, Mariar,—I can't make 'em sense how things is," Mrs. Cutler would reply in her gentle, pacific way.

"I guess you *could*," Mrs. Ben would retort, with a toss of the head, "if you wasn't afraid of humblin' their feelin's. Fer *my* part I don't believe in bringin' folks up to ride high horses when they don't own so much as a mule to git a straddle of."

Relief, to some extent at least, from this nerve-racking, soul-torturing state of living came to Mrs. Cutler in an unlooked-for way. Her brother Daniel suddenly began building. He put up a neat and comfortable if unpretentious

house upon his own land. It was whispered loud enough to be heard for miles around that "Dan'l" Tewksbury was going to be married. Whether people were wrong in their surmises — whether he was simply tired of boarding in strange houses, or whether he did indeed plan to install a wife in the new house never became positively known to anyone. If such had been his intention, some disappointment or change of heart had prevented its consummation. The new house stood vacant for several months after its completion,—an object of mystery and source of endless conjectures to everyone.

One day, Daniel made a call upon Mrs. Cutler at Ben's house, the first time he had set foot across the threshold since his exit—and it may be added—the last time for many years to come. As a result of this visit, Mrs. Cutler, Priscilla and Ned went to live with him in the house that had been built,—perhaps with a view to a far different occupancy.

The change was a welcome one all around. Mrs. Ben Tewksbury proclaimed her relief loudly to all her friends. "I declare," she would say, "for the first time sense I come here, I feel as if I was in my own house. I couldn't a-stood them childern much longer, they was so ugly 'n' disagreeable, 'n' Ben 'n' me puttin' the bread 'n' butter into their mouths."

Mrs. Cutler said nothing, but she brightened visibly and her manner lost something of the timid, deprecating nervousness which had become habitual under Mrs. Ben's constant nagging. To be sure, it turned out that Daniel was not the most agreeable nor the most cheerful person in the world to live with. Whether his moroseness and irritability were traceable solely to the quarrel over the lane, which smouldered from year to year, gathering strength for a more virulent outbreak as each season for planting drew near, or whether it was due to some disappointment of the heart, Mrs. Cutler did not know. But at the worst she found his company a relief from Maria Tewksbury's and she was not obliged to endure so much of it. In the

long stretches of the day, when Daniel was away, busy with his farm work, Mrs. Cutler went about the peaceful house or worked among the flowers in the garden, tending them with affectionate zeal, drawing long breaths of a relief that amounted almost to content which seemed to give her a new lease upon life and to relieve her of years of pent-up suffering.

The children attended the country school during the winters—their only chance of getting an education, which they improved to the utmost. Before and after school hours and during the summer they helped in the work of the house and farm. Yet notwithstanding the fact that the work of the house, in season and out, was done by Mrs. Cutler and Priscilla, and that Ned's labors amounted to those of a man, they were all—by a curious process of reasoning with which every one is familiar—regarded as "living on" Daniel Tewksbury, as recipients of his bounty. "The laborer is worthy of his hire," and in work similar to this of his board also; but the Cutlers, mother and children, being paid nothing for their labor, were, by some unsolvable calculation, considered as eating the bread of Daniel Tewksbury's generous charity.

As time went on this opinion became extremely galling to young Ned Cutler. As Ned grew from boyhood into young manhood his aspirations, unfortunately for his peace of mind, seemed far beyond anything which, with his restricted opportunities, were ever likely to be realized. All his life long he had heard Mrs. Ben making great plans for Sid and when the day arrived at last upon which Sid set forth upon what seemed to the Columbia Corners' people, a very high and mighty career, Ned was secretly nourishing the hope that when he was a little older, he too, would go to college and try his mettle with the best of the boys. But when two years had passed the consummation of his hopes seemed farther away than ever, and poor Ned began to realize how slim were his chances of getting the coveted "college education."

One day, in a burst of confidence, Ned revealed to his

mother his cherished dreams. "But I suppose there isn't any use thinking about it, is there, mother?" was the doleful wind-up of his confession of ambition.

"I'm afeard not," his mother answered, her eyes meeting his with troubled tenderness. "I wisht you could go to collidge if you want to,—but we ain't got any money 'n' I don't see how you can git any."

"You don't think Uncle Dan'l would lend me any, do you?" Ned suggested dubiously. "I could pay it back as soon as I started in earning."

Mrs. Cutler began to tremble. "I'd be afeard to ask him."

"Don't look so scairt, mother; I wouldn't expect *you* to ask him, anyway."

"If you *could* go, Ned," his mother asked with wistful interest, "what would you learn fer to be?"

"I want to be a civil engineer," Ned answered promptly.

His mother replied in a tone of gentle admonition, "*Whatever* you'd study fer to be, I'd want you always to be civil!"

Ned laughed. "It won't be your fault if I ain't, mother," he said, looking at her affectionately, "but you don't understand. It's a civil engineer that lays out the course of great railroads. He puts tunnels through mountains and under rivers and bridges over them — like suspension bridge at Niagara Falls and the Brooklyn bridge down in New York! — *that's* the sort of thing I'd like to learn how to do!"

Ned's gaze was far off — his eyes lambent with an inward flame of enthusiasm. Again a tremor shook Mrs. Cutler's frail figure. So often she had seen his father look like that when he was wrapped in the thought of his inventions!

"You look awful like your pa to-night, Ned," she half whispered, and sighed in the same breath, remembering her husband's disastrously futile efforts.

Her heart yearned with a new anxiety over Ned. As he sat absorbed, saying nothing, tracing and retracing the

pattern of the oilcloth on the kitchen table at his side, she watched him with solicitude; at length she said plaintively, "You're feelin' bad because you can't go, ain't you, Ned?"

"No, no," he roused himself to reply, "I was just thinking, that's all. Don't you worry about me, Ma."

Most of the crops had been harvested, the corn had been cut and was now being gathered into tepee-shaped stacks, there to stand for the golden ears to dry and harden for the husking. The sunshine was bright, the air cold and sparkling. Ned's face was glowing with health and exercise. With youthful strength he gathered, stacked and tied the corn-laden stalks. Watching his ceaseless activity no one would have suspected that he was gathering, stacking, tying, to the unending, tormenting questions. "How can I go to college? How can I get an education? How can I get to be a civil engineer?"

The cornfield bordered the highway for a considerable distance and Justice Witherspoon driving past drew rein as he saw Ned at work. "Corn crop pretty good, Ned?" he called across the short intervening distance.

"'Bout the same as usual," Ned answered, stopping his work out of courtesy to the Judge.

"Folks all well? — Mother? — Uncle Dan'l?"

"Very well, thank you, Judge."

"Oh — and *Priscilla* — didn't mean to forget her — she pretty well?"

"Very well, thank you, Judge."

"Haven't seen her in the village lately — didn't know but she was poorly."

"She's been pretty busy — I guess that's why she hasn't been 'round more."

"Well," — beginning to gather up the reins, "farming's most over for *this* year — you'll all have a breathin' spell. Going to school this winter?"

Ned almost jumped as the Justice put this question; it seemed as if his own thoughts had suddenly voiced them-

selves. He hesitated a moment, answering uncertainly, "I don't know, Judge,—I haven't made up my mind yet."

"Oh, I see," said the Judge good-humoredly, "think mebbe you know as much 's is good for you now, eh?"

Ned flushed, but he answered the Judge's sally with spirit. "I ain't such an all-fired fool as to think that, Judge."

The Judge's face beamed approval. "There's a land o' promise ahead fer them that don't think they know it all. Git ap there," a tickle of the whip on her flank set the horse capering. "Jest tell yer ma I asked fer her — oh — and — Priscilla — don't want to ferget Priscilla — she's all right, you say? — jest tell her I'm glad to hear it, will ye? Mornin'!" under the loosened rein the horse bounded forward.

"Judge! — wait a minute! — I want to ask you something" — with sudden resolution Ned had leaped the fence. He ran along the roadside until he came up to the Judge, who had again drawn the rein on his prancing horse.

In a flash it had seemed to Ned that the Judge had been especially sent to him that morning as an answer to his persistent inward questionings — how singular that he should have asked him if he were going to school that winter. It was like a reflection in the Justice's mind of his own thoughts. Ned did not put it in just this way but it was the substance of the thought that impelled him to call out to the Judge and stop him — the Judge was a man of knowledge and experience of the world; for some reason he had always been very friendly — seemed to make a point of stopping to speak to him, and always asked after his mother with much interest. To be sure, he seemed to remember Priscilla with an effort but he always acted sorry for it and by way of making amends for his apparent indifference he invariably mentioned her several times — as he had done just now. He was sure the Judge would be both able and willing to give him some advice that would help him. All this had come to Ned with the rush of one

big mental impression without words—"Justice Wither-spoon"—Ned broke the ice "plump" before his courage had time to fail him—"I want to go to college!"

The Judge was plainly astonished. "What! you got the college bee?"

"If that's what you call it, Judge, I've got it sure enough," Ned answered ruefully.

The Judge's eyes twinkled. "Want to hang out a rival M. D. shingle to Sid Tewksbury?"

"No, sir," Ned laughed. "What I want to learn is civil engineering."

"Civil engineering! what put that into your head?"

"I don't know. It just came; that's all I know about it—and I can't get it *out* of my head. But I don't know how I'm going to get a chance to study it. I've got to go where I'll learn more than I can here in country school—that's why I said I hadn't made up my mind about going there this winter. I thought perhaps you could tell me what I'd better do."

"What's your Uncle Dan'l say about it?"

"I haven't spoken to Uncle Dan'l, I've only told mother. That's the biggest trouble—I don't believe he'd be willing for me to go away to study anything—Uncle Dan'l expects me to stay here on the farm."

The Judge listened with an interest which encouraged Ned, though for a moment he said nothing, scanning with a keen glance the boy's eager, troubled face.

"There's mor'n one road leads to Rome," he said at last, reflectively, "and there's gen'rally mor'n one way for people to git what they're after. All the education I ever got I got in the country schools and academies. What I know about law I learned from readin' and from actual experience in the lawyers' offices—and I've managed to get along so-so. But things was different when I was beginnin'. A corn doctor has to hev a diplomy these days. It would be best for you to go to college if you can and I should say the first thing for you to do is to sound your

Uncle Dan'l on the subject and find out *fer sure* just where he stands."

"Yes, sir — that does seem the best thing to do. I'll ask him — but I guess all I can say won't do much good."

The Justice sat for a moment in silence, evidently turning something over in his mind. "Do you s'pose it would do you any good," he said, "if I spoke to your Uncle Dan'l for you?"

Ned's eyes beamed with delight. "I guess it would! Uncle Dan'l thinks a lot of anything *you* say."

"All right," said the Judge, leaning over the side of his road wagon to give Ned his hand. "First chance I git that seems to come round natural I'll speak to him."

Ned wrung the proffered hand gratefully. "Suppose Uncle Dan'l gets one of his obstinate fits on and says he won't help me?"

"Then we'll have to git out our thinkin' caps 'n' dust the cobwebs off'n 'em. If the's more ways 'n one o' gittin' to Rome 'n' the office o' Justice o' the Peace I guess the's more'n one road to civil engineerin'!" was the Judge's cheery answer, which sent Ned back to work with a more hopeful heart than he had known for many a day.

It was not long, as it happened, before an occasion presented itself that seemed to the Judge to be propitious. Daniel had driven into town to deliver sundry butter, eggs and vegetables to various customers and on his way home had stopped at Judge Witherspoon's office to consult him upon some small matter referring to taxes. This settled, the Justice prolonged his visit by talk on topics of the day, made friendly inquiries concerning Mrs. Cutler, Priscilla and finally broached the especial object in his mind at the moment — Ned.

"Ned Cutler's gittin' quite a young man — a nice young fellow, too, seemingly! — what you plannin' to do with him?" The Judge asked the question with apparent ingenuousness, tilting his chair back against the wall and thrusting his thumbs in the arm sizes of his waistcoat.

"Do with him! whut ye mean?" Daniel answered, with a puzzled expression. "Didn't know as I was expected to do anything with him."

"Why — what you goin' to have him learn? I mean what's he goin' to learn to make a livin' at?"

"Ned's a pretty good farmer — guess the' ain't no danger o' his starvin'."

"Sure he wants to *be* a farmer?"

"He hain't said nothin' to me to the contrary."

"Well" — the Justice was feeling his way cautiously — "from some remarks he let drop the other day — I jest happened by and fell into conversation with him — I guess his idee is for somethin' else."

"He wouldn't be a Cutler if he didn't hev some tom-foolish notion in his head."

"Not a bit of it!" protested the Judge — "the boy wants to get an education, that's all!" — here the Judge thought he might as well take the bull boldly by the horns, — "he wants to go to college."

"If ye don't call that a tom-fool notion I'd like to hev your idee of what *is*!" Daniel eyed the Judge with a shrewd look. "I s'pose Ned thinks he's pretty cute gittin' you to talk to me — he knowed the' wan't no use o' *his* comin' to me with such nonsense."

"Now, see here, Dan'l Tewksb'ry!" the Judge brought the front legs of his chair down on the floor with a bang in his earnestness; "the boy don't like farmin'; he wants to go to college to study civil engineerin'. I b'lieve he's got stuff in him! there ain't any harm in his tryin', anyway. Because you 'n' me didn't go to college is no reason Ned shouldn't. The world's moved some sense we was boys 'n' the young folks git more chances. Come, now, he's your own sister's boy and a good steady-goin' chap; loosen up and give him some kind of a show."

"I ain't got no money to waste experimentin' with collidges." The tone was one of set refusal.

"See here now — tell ye what I'll do." The Judge slapped the table with his opened palm, impressively. "I'm

an old bach — neither chick nor child to look out fer, and I've got a few spare dollars. You just say you're agreeable and I'll take care of the expense — 'twon't cost *you* a darn cent."

To Judge Witherspoon's surprise Daniel at once vetoed any such arrangement with a certain grim setting of the mouth which told the judge that he had run up against what Ned had described as one of his uncle's "obstinate fits."

"The's too many young folks leavin' the farms these days fer all sorts o' things 'n' places that they think is *better*. Ned ud never go to collidge if I could pervent it even if he hed the money to go without acceptin' of charity. I don't b'lieve in it! His father was a sort of a kind of gentleman — we all know how he ended up. I hear 't Ben 'n' Mariar says they're goin' to make one out o' Sid! — the Lord on'y knows what sort of a fist he'll make of it! As for Ned — he'd best stick to the plow! — the's plenty o' room fer good farmers — I don't b'lieve in spilin' 'em to make no-account gentlemen!"

Judge Witherspoon perceived that to say more was useless. For Ned's sake he was sorry that his effort had been so unsuccessful, yet he admitted to himself that in spite of the narrowness, even the ignorance of Daniel Tewksbury's opinions, there was yet a grain of hard-headed, practical sense in them.

A day or so later the Judge, driving past the farm, saw Ned at work and beckoned to him. "Your Uncle Dan'l said anything to you?" he asked as Ned came to the wagon.

"No, sir," said Ned. Then with eagerness. "Have you spoken to him?"

"Yes, I have."

"How did he take it?"

"Spewed it up the minute I dosed 'im! I knew it 'ud be a hard pill for him to take so I put on the best sugar coating I knew how: but he wouldn't swaller."

"It was kind of you to take so much trouble, Judge — but I guess I didn't really expect he *would* be favorable. I'd

made up my mind that if he wouldn't help me go to college I'd get away from here quick—and I will! I can find someway to get along—I ain't afraid of work."

"Easy, my boy, easy! now don't go runnin' away! It's mighty hard to earn a living, sometimes. You don't know as much as I do about that!—and your Uncle Dan'l may be right—you want to think over it good and hard. You might end up by bein' a credit to yourself and the soil as a farmer—and you mightn't turn out enough of a civil engineer to lay a drain pipe."

"I think I *would*, sir!" a little flash leaped into Ned's eyes, not unnoticed by the Justice.

"Your Uncle Dan'l's so set against your bein' anything but a farmer I'm almost afraid to encourage you in opposing him; in case it didn't turn out all right I'd feel that I'd better 'a kep' my finger out o' the pie. It's a kind o' ticklish matter—but it seems to me;—it seems to me," the Judge repeated musingly, "that you ought to have a chance for a go at it and I've a mind to back you on the quiet—even at the risk of spilin' you for the future for either use or ornament."

"You've taken a lot of trouble for me, Judge," said Ned gratefully, and what ever you say I'll do—for the present, anyway."

"That's it,—for the present," said the Judge with kindly reassurance. "You're young yet—you can afford to wait a few months before taking any decisive step. Now I take it, that if you want to be a civil engineer, there's a good many things you can learn right here that'll help you along a lot. *Now*,—I propose that you lay low till next spring. Go to school this winter—learn everything you can—'specially mathematics. I've got a fairish library—I guess we will find something in it that you can study with advantage—I'll lend you anything you want. When spring gits here we'll take stock, see where we stand and make up our minds what's the best next thing to do. How does this plan strike you?"

"Great!" said Ned, eagerly grasping at the proposition

—"but I'm afraid it'll be an awful lot of bother for you."

"No bother, no bother at all," was the hearty answer, "and if you've got the real stuff in you you can get a good solid start that'll help you when your chance does come."

"I'll do my best sir," said Ned gratefully, "but you know I'll have to study what times I can get without Uncle Dan'll knowing it."

"Um—I suppose you will have to deceive him to that extent but I guess if you never do anything worse he won't have much cause to complain."

"I'd like to look over your books—would you mind if I came to-morrow?"

"All right—but don't come till evenin'. I'm goin' t' Boston in the mornin' 'n' won't be back 'fore six o'clock."

At about that hour on the following day the Judge entered his room at the Putnam House with a bulky parcel which he at once proceeded to open, arranging the contents upon a shelf in one of his bookcases. There were books of mathematics—algebra, geometry, trigonometry; a couple of volumes of an "Elementary Treatise on Surveying and Mapping," one on "Plane Surveying," and various others bearing directly and indirectly upon the subject of civil engineering,—with several histories, accounts or sketches of the great engineering feats of the world and of the men who had accomplished them.

"Why, Judge!" Ned exclaimed in delighted amazement as his eyes ran over these unexpected treasures. "I never thought a *lawyer* would have such a lot of books on such a subject as civil engineering!"

"'Tis sort o' surprisin'," the Judge answered, stroking his chin reflectively. "But then you know lawyers are obliged to look up all sorts o' things, sometimes. I reely fergit what case I was on 'at I wanted to look up them subjects a bit. Anyhow, there they be—help yourself."

As Ned walked home that night with a couple of the books buttoned tight under his coat, they seemed to start a little fire of hope within his heart that burned with most comforting warmth. From this time on he pursued his

secret studies with determination. His mother and Priscilla, in whom alone he confided, were at first inclined to view the plan with misgivings, not unmixed with alarm. "I don't know but what it's wrong for you to be settin' yourself up agin' yer uncle's wishes," his mother protested; "'n' besides, I don't know 'bout your gittin mixed up with Jestice Withersp'n. 'Course, he's a judge 'n' a man o' means—but he's awful wild 'n' wicked in his way o' livin'—so folks say. I know he don't belong to no church."

"He's been kinder to me than the ones that go to church every Sunday," Ned asserted stoutly.

"Yes, mother, that's so," said Priscilla warmly, "and even if he is wicked himself, I don't believe he'd want Ned to do anything that wasn't right."

"Bully for you, Priscilla," exclaimed Ned in delight at the unexpected championship. "And what's more,—*I don't believe he's wicked*, I don't care *what* people say!"

Mrs. Cutler shook her head dubiously, but said no more, and offered no further opposition to Ned's arrangement with Judge Witherspoon. Indeed it is doubtful if she could ever have steadfastly set herself to oppose her children in anything they had set their heart on—especially Ned, who was the very center and sun of her life. Throughout the winter Ned was regular in his attendance at the country school. "It does seem," Maria Tewksbury remarked patronizingly, "'s if Ned Cutler couldn't be perticklerly smart; seems as if he ought to know readin', writin', 'n' 'rithmetic without goin' to country school agin'."

Fortunately the young man who was laudably adding to his income by teaching through the winter happened to be more than usually thorough in mathematics. Ned's mother and Priscilla were able to give a good deal of help in the way of finding chances for him to pore over the books which he borrowed from the Justice and in keeping his Uncle Daniel from discovering the way in which his will was being disregarded. The pursuit of learning, under these circumstances, was often difficult, but Ned stuck manfully to it. The result was pleasing to the Justice, not only in

the progress made by Ned in actual knowledge acquired, but as indicating a certain strength of character which in the beginning, to tell the truth, he had not thought the young man possessed.

In the meantime, Sid had returned home upon his several vacations, sometimes alone, more often with a visiting companion, but always with much maternal beating of drums and braying of trumpets, and always with an increasing air of superiority over the humble denizens of the Corners in general, and his cousin Ned in particular. "Sid acts as if he thought he'd used up the hull world 'n' was jest livin' on now t' 'commode Providence," was the Judge's comment on Sid's behavior.

It was during this period that Mrs. Tewksbury had felt it advisable to throw out the wing on one side of the house, the bay window on the other, and the elaborate porch over the front door. She felt that a son of hers coming home from college, with other college young men as guests, should be able to bring them to a place for which he need not blush. She considered that it was helping Sid along in the world.

"Them young men all belong to elegant fam'blys," she confided to the "church ladies," at their various teas, festivals, sewing circles, and so on, "and they're right into the best s'ciety. Sid's hand 'n' glove with 'em 'n' I'm bound to do all I can to help him. The' ain't nothin' helps a doctor along like bein' in s'ciety. Wouldn't wonder if Sid 'ud settle down to practise in a big town like Worcester er Springfield."

In order to meet the expense of these additions to the house, and Sid's rapidly increasing requests for money—to sustain his high social position at college (so he explained to his parents)—it was found necessary to put a mortgage on the farm—the one referred to by Mrs. Pettigrew as being a source of pride to Mrs. Ben on account of its superior size.

But Sid, in his college career, seemed to follow the course

of the oft-quoted rocket and stick. He was eventually returned to Columbia Corners without a diploma — as was disclosed by “Mrs. Doctor Lewis,” and in the opinion of the neighborhood without having acquired enough medical knowledge to “pizin a sick cat.”

What untoward circumstances cut short his collegiate career and his admiring mother’s hopes were never divulged, and it was the one thing about which Maria Tewksbury never talked.

Daniel Tewksbury gave it as his opinion that “Sid hed jest about enough powder in his top piece to blow out the fuse — but he didn’t hev enough to keep the fireworks fizzin’.” He added: “But I knowed f’m the fust that Sid ’d squash out; if Ben ’n’ Mariar ’d ast *me*, I’d a told ’em to hev ’im learn how t’ run the farm — a farmer in the hand is wuth no eend o’ doctors in the bush, *ev’ry time*.”

CHAPTER VI

UNDER THE LILACS

So the affairs of the Tewksburys and the Cutlers stood upon that memorable day preceding the meeting of the Foreign Missions Branch of the Ladies' Aid Society at Mrs. Anson Peabody's. That morning the sun, long risen and brightly awake, was sending its hot and searching glances down upon a little party of women trudging along the dusty edges of the highroad.

They were bound for Lilac Lane upon invitation of Mrs. Ben Tewksbury to gather lilacs with which to decorate their church. An "Ice Cream Festival" was to be held there in the evening in the hopes of swelling a slow-growing fund in process of collection for the purchase of a Brussels carpet to replace the worn and faded ingrain one now ornamenting the floor of the parsonage parlor. Among the number so diligent in well doing were Mrs. Pettigrew, Mrs. Lunn, Mrs. Tibbitts and Miss Fitch. Mrs. Anson Peabody was conspicuous by her absence. Later in the day Mrs. Peabody would assist in trimming the church, but she did not join the other ladies in gathering the flowers. She held herself aloof from all such expeditions—from berry-pickings, surprise parties, and all such indiscriminate intimacies. It was one of the fine lines she drew to emphasize the exclusiveness of her social position.

"My!" Miss Fitch ejaculated, pushing back her sunhat and wiping the perspiration from her face with a large size, immaculately white, and carefully ironed cotton pocket handkerchief, "It's gittin' awful warm. We ought to a-started earlier."

"Mariar said not to come too early, 'cause she couldn't be here till Sid hed his breakfast, 'n' *he* doesn't *git up* till

eight o'clock!" Mrs. Lunn's tone conveyed her opinion of Sid's habits.

"Jest *think* of any one layin' abed till eight o'clock!" exclaimed Mrs. Tibbitts. "I call it flyin' in the face o' Providence! If 't hed ben intended fer folks to sleep till sech hours the sun wouldn't a ben made to git up either."

Mrs. Pettigrew laughed. "The *diffick* wilty with Sid is," said she, "that sence he's been to collidge, he thinks he kin learn Providence one er two things. Mariar's goin' to hev *her* hands full, I guess!" Which prospect for Mrs. Ben Tewksbury seemed to give Mrs. Pettigrew exquisite pleasure.

A country wagon, drawn by a pair of heavy farm horses, clattered up behind them. The women looked around to see who was coming.

"If 'tain't old man Goslin 'n' his boy Joe!" ejaculated Mrs. Tibbitts. Mrs. Lunn drew the brim of her hat well down over that side of her face nearest Mrs. Pettigrew.

As the wagon drew near, the elder man, who was driving, brought his horses to a standstill. "Good mornin', good mornin'," he called out in a lively, squeaking voice; "you wimmin folks want to pile in 'n' ride? — yes — jesso — jesso —"

"Guess 'tain't worth the climbin', thank ye," Mrs. Pettigrew answered; "we're goin' to turn in at Lilack Lane."

"Sorry I didn't ketch up with ye sooner," said Mr. Goslin, answering Mrs. Pettigrew, but to that lady's inward amusement his gaze was fixed upon the spare and angular figure of Mrs. Lunn just ahead. Mr. Goslin continued with lively interest, "That's Mis' Lunn, ain't it? Yes — jesso — jesso."

When Mrs. Lunn turned round her face was calmly impassive. "Good mornin', Mr. Goslin," she said with a stiffness which the occasion did not seem to warrant.

Mr. Goslin grinned amiably, disclosing his two remaining teeth, a solitary upper and lower front. "Thought I recko'nized your figger — yes — jesso — jesso —"

"Hope you're feelin' pretty well this mornin', Mr. Goslin," Mrs. Lunn hurriedly interrupted.

"Great!" answered Mr. Goslin, swelling out his shrunken chest and giving it a resounding thump with a rickety arm; "feelin' great! 'F I felt any better, by cricky! the' couldn't nobuddy hold me! — yes — jesso — jesso."

The son, who had recognized the women by a nod bestowed indifferently around, drew down his brows. "Guess we ain't got no time to hang 'round," he broke in, brusquely, at the same time giving the horses a smart touch with the whip, which set them going so suddenly that Mr. Goslin was jerked backward with imminent danger to the reins and decided injury to his assumption of youthful jauntiness. Having recovered his equilibrium, which the unappreciative Joe had so ruthlessly upset, he turned, as the horses and wagon rattled round a bend in the road, and waved his hand airily in good-bye to the women.

"I never knew what an awful pleasant sort old man Goslin reely is!" Miss Fitch's words seemed tame, but her tone expressed intense admiration.

"And ain't he gittin' spry!" exclaimed Mrs. Tibbitts. "I ain't seen him drivin' fer years on account o' bein' liable to hev the rheumatiz take him in the wrist jints."

Mrs. Pettigrew quivered with half-suppressed laughter, as she answered, "There ain't nothin' like bein' left a widower fer limberin' up a man's jints."

"Here's Lilack Lane at last," cried Miss Fitch with a sigh of relief, seating herself under the nearest one of the double line of lilac trees stretching across the Tewksbury farms.

"Mariar ain't here yit," Mrs. Lunn complained, casting a disapproving glance along the lane and over the opposite fields toward the Ben Tewksbury house. "Sid must be lazier 'n' common this mornin'."

"I'd like to see *myself* cookin' breakfast after six o'clock fer the pres'dent of the United States — if I was his ma."

"Guess the pres'dent wouldn't put on you that much,

Mis' Tibbitts—least ways, he wouldn't expect sech a thing from his *ma*! F'm all accounts he's a pretty nice sort o' man." Miss Fitch's confidence in proper presidential conduct was an inheritance from Revolutionary ancestors.

"I guess before Mariar ends up she'll hev worse to put up with f'm Sid than cookin' late breakfasts," Mrs. Pettigrew prophesied with cheery pessimism. "Fur's I kin see into things it's goin' to turn out jest like a sim'lar case I heard about onct. First off, everybody hed breakfast at six—then they begun to git stylish 'n' the young folks begun to hev so much *diffickwilty* in gittin' up thet they got later and later 'bout gittin' down to cook the breakfast. 'Twasn't so many years before the *diffickwilty* wuz that they didn't hev no breakfast to cook!" The laughing complacency with which Mrs. Pettigrew viewed a probable breakfastless finish for the Ben Tewksburys was an object lesson for all students of "don't worry" axioms. Whether she would have viewed such a prospect in her own family with such delightful equanimity it would be impossible to say with certainty.

"There's Mariar at last," proclaimed Mrs. Tibbitts with great relief, as a large, heavily-set woman came into view round the corner of the Tewksbury house.

Miss Fitch craned her neck to see round the lilac tree beside which she was sitting. "Yes, 'tis! I'd know her step among a million. Mariar always walks 's if she was treadin' down rebellin' worms."

"She won't git here fer a few minutes—we may as well set down where it's shady 'n' rest ourselves," said Mrs. Lunn, suiting the action to the word with an accompaniment of laboriously creaking joints.

"My," she went on, gazing up and down the double line of giant lilac trees laden with the sweet-scented, graceful sprays of white, of deepest purple, and palest lilac tint, "ain't this lane about the purttest thing you ever seed?"

"Everybody says that — when the lilacs is in blossom," affirmed Miss Fitch.

"Everybody 'xcept the Tewksb'ry's," said Mrs. Tibbitts. "It's a reg'lar eyesore to them."

"Yes," said Mrs. Pettigrew, laughing again, "I've heard first one o' the boys 'n' then the other cuss lilacks till everything around was ez blue ez the flowers air themselves."

Fully fifty years or more had passed since the elder Tewksbury had planted these lilac trees. They had flourished sturdily with the passing of those years, growing to gigantic size, and flowering each year in a very prodigality of beauty — while the strong hands which had set their young roots in the soil had grown feeble, had dropped nerveless from their work, had been folded in final rest, and had long since returned to the dust of swift passing mortality; they had kept on growing, blazoning forth each year in exquisite harmonies of color and sweet scents, while the two sons of the man who had planted them had quarreled with the sullen resistance of savages of stranger tribes over their disputed possession.

To-day the great branches of the lilac trees rustled their thickly growing leaves above the women's heads and nodded their graceful, drooping plumes of blossoms, whispering among themselves, perhaps, of the family quarrel in which they were playing a part, wondering what its end would be — shivering now and then as if with a presentiment of the violent scene drawing imminently nearer.

Mrs. Ben Tewksbury approached steadily, with the masterful tread which had been commented upon by Miss Fitch. She came straight on, making a "cross cut" over the fields, not stopping to pick her way to avoid a rock or stubby place as any one of the four women waiting for her would probably have done — and the stone at once made for itself a little hole of refuge in the ground, while the ridgy stubble spread itself accommodately flat. Even the most indifferent observer of character would receive

the impression from Mrs. Ben's large and well-knit figure, from the flash of her full, dark eyes, from the firm set of mouth and jaw—even from the crisp, decided waves of her black hair, that she was a woman born to rule. Mrs. Pettigrew often declared that "Mariar Tewksb'ry didn't haf to hev no brass buttons ner ep'lets to make folks toe the mark—she was a reg'lar born'd brigadier gin-ral." But there was one to whom Mrs. Tewksbury had never presented the martial front of command. To the son, who, in her eyes, was everything that was perfect, she was a willing, adoring slave. What "Sid" did was always right; what "Sid" said must always be listened to; what "Sid" wanted he must have; "Sid's" wishes were her laws.

She saw the women waiting for her under the lilac trees and called out to them as soon as she was within speaking distance. "Guess you folks thought I wasn't never comin'."

Mrs. Pettigrew answered for the party. "No," she said jocularly, "we kind o' thought Sid 'd git up to breakfast sometime 'fore the chickens go to roost."

"Well, he did sleep a little later 'n' usual this mornin', but he wa'n't reely to blame—hed sech a headache!—he couldn't hardly see when he did get up. He'd been settin' up till all hours of the night, studyin'," Mrs. Ben concluded, with proud approval.

Miss Fitch sat up with an astonished jerk. "Studyin'! I sh'd of thought he'd a-learnt ev'ry thing the' *was* to learn when he was to collidge."

"Must be perty expensive burnin' so much ker'sene," commented Mrs. Lunn disapprovingly.

"Seems to *me*," said Mrs. Tibbitts, "'t if I hed anything left over to learn I'd git up 'n' learn it early in the mornin'."

"Of course," responded Mrs. Tewksbury, flashing the full fire of her imperious eyes upon little Mrs. Tibbitts, "'*would* seem so to *you*, Harriet Tibbitts, er mebbe to *me*. But any one 'at goes to *collidge* 'n' gits to mixin' with fash'nable big bugs natchelly gits considerable different idees from jest plain country folks like *we* be."

Mrs. Tibbitts, with a flurried glance at Mrs. Ben from

her shallow china blue eyes subsided at once, flattened out, figuratively speaking, as flat as the stubble under Mrs. Tewksbury's emphatic foot.

Mrs. Pettigrew shook and chuckled in a spasm of great enjoyment. The squelching of Mrs. Tibbitts tickled her, and the spectacle of Sid Tewksbury being dangled aloft by his mother as an object for every one's worshipful admiration was, as she frequently declared when out of Mrs. Tewksbury's hearing, "enough to make a horse laugh." The sarcasm of Mrs. Pettigrew's laugh was too subtle for Mrs. Ben's analysis, but she vaguely felt it. Her face flushed. "I *declare*, Lib Pettigrew," she exclaimed testily, "I believe you'd laff if 'twas to your own fun'ral!"

Mrs. Pettigrew wiped a hilarious tear from the corner of her eye. "'Xpect th'd be enough fer me to laff *at* — if 'twas pos'ble fer me to do it — specially if I got to wond'r in', when Pettigrew was takin' on, how long 't'd be 'fore he'd be usin' hair dye. Seen old man Goslin lately?"

"No, I ain't," replied Mrs. Tewksbury stiffly.

"Well," continued Mrs. Pettigrew, "he didn't outwardly appear to be enjoyin' himself t' any great extent to Abby's fun'ral, but I guess he's hevin' fun enough now t' make up fer it."

"Hedn't we better be gatherin' the lilacks?" asked Mrs. Lunn, getting to her feet with sudden energy. "It's a gittin' hotter 'n' hotter."

"So 'tis, 'n' we better be hurryin' if we 'xpect t' git back so's to hev dinner cooked on time," said Mrs. Tibbitts, reviving from the state of coma into which she had been temporarily plunged by Mrs. Ben Tewksbury.

"Come down to the far end of the lane," said that lady, starting briskly forward, the women ranging after her. "The trees ain't so high there — you kin strip 'em off easier."

As they approached the end of the lane they all involuntarily paused, with the exception of Mrs. Ben, as they came to a long and narrow mound upon which the grass was neatly cut. Flowers were planted in a thick border around

it, and large earthen jars filled with lilacs stood at head and foot.

"Guess Marthy comes here 'most every day," commented Mrs. Lunn in wonder.

"It's astonishin' she don't git tired o' keepin' it up fer so many years," Mrs. Tibbitts added.

Mrs. Tewksbury sniffed derisively. "Marthy Cutler's got a screw loose *some* wheres. I'd like to see *myself* riggin' flowers over a man 'at didn't leave me money enough to buy so much as six feet o' ground to put him into."

"I s'pose," said Miss Fitch, with singular obtuseness, beginning to pull down and break off great bunches of lilacs as she spoke, "seein' we're here by your invite we'd best pull the lilacks f'm your side o' the lane. There's Dan'l over there in the timberpatch," she went on, nodding in that direction. "He's watchin' us—'xpect he'd like to order us out o' here."

The women looked across the fields. Daniel Tewksbury was leaning on his plow, gazing at them. Near him, in the edge of the timber, a couple of men were chopping wood. Someone was crossing the fields lower down near the road—they could not make out who it was.

Over by the Ben Tewksbury barns several men were busy. One of them looked like Ben himself. Something in his movements was peculiarly suggestive of a determined preparation for some task neglected which must be accomplished without further delay.

Miss Fitch's remark opened the vials of Mrs. Ben's wrath. She turned upon her vehemently. "Artemishy Fitch! does this land belong to Dan'l Tewksb'ry er does it belong to me?"

"Oh, fer goodness sakes, Mariar, don't git stirred up now about this old lane," laughed the irreverent Mrs. Pettigrew. "What *we* think ain't goin' to settle the *diffick*-wilty, anyway."

"That's so," returned Mrs. Ben; "the' ain't but one thing'll settle it. The Lane's *ourn*, 'n' we're goin' to hev it. Ben said this mornin' 't he was tired o' foolin' about

it,—'twouldn't s'prise me if he started in to cuttin' down the lilack trees to-day."

"Oh, do come — let's go back home," said Mrs. Tibbitts in a frightened whisper, plucking at Mrs. Pettigrew's sleeve.

"What fer?" queried Mrs. Pettigrew. "If the's to be any goin's on I want to be here to see the fun."

"Ye needn't be oneasy, Harriet," said Mrs. Lunn; "ye know they've talked like this, 'n' *worse*, fer years, 'n' talk don't break no bones. Guess we don't need to worry about anything happenin' to-day."

Thus reassured, Mrs. Tibbitts was soon engaged in a lively rivalry with the other women in stripping the trees of their flowery burden.

At the same time, Emily and her cousin Will, strolling leisurely along the main road, reached the lane, and stopped to draw a breath of relief in the cool, deliciously perfumed shade of the lilac trees.

The man who had crossed the fields a few moments before was not far off, hoeing corn. He did not look up as Will and Emily passed — apparently he did not see them. He bent a little lower over his work. At the first glance Emily had recognized Ned.

"It's a dickens of a way yet," exclaimed Will, with a note of fretfulness in his voice, as he looked across the stretch of sunny road between them and the Ben Tewksbury's house. "I don't see why in the world Aunt Julia sent us out here this morning."

"Mother wants Mrs. Tewksbury to bring all the teaspoons she can spare over to the church this evening — she thought we'd enjoy the walk out here to tell her. Of course she didn't know how warm it was going to be." Emily reached up and broke off a big spray of lilacs.

"I wish Sid would show himself — I'd call him over here and he could take the message to his mother." Will watched the house with keen impatience. "Wonder if he's up yet," he went on, half to himself, his eyes watering with the exquisite pain of stifling a surreptitious yawn.

"Up yet!" echoed Emily in surprise, "why, it's ten o'clock if it's a minute. Why shouldn't he be up?"

"Why,—I don't know—no *reason*—I was just wondering if"—he checked himself suddenly, straining his eyes toward the house with what seemed to Emily an unnecessary anxiety. "It's funny he isn't around, that's all," he concluded.

"Well," said Emily with cheerful indifference—"he'll probably come out pretty soon." She fanned gently with her big sunhat, a pretty creation of soft blue mull and white lace, letting her glance linger upon Ned's active figure. Let's wait here a while," she continued; "we needn't be in any hurry."

Will threw himself upon the ground, pulling impatiently at the long grass. Emily, leaning at ease against one of the lilac trees, kept the apparently unobserving Ned well in view with frequent glances darted from under her drooping lashes. The silence became uncomfortable. Emily and her cousin Will had never found much in common to talk about and to-day conversation seemed more difficult than usual.

The moments passed; still Sid was nowhere to be seen.

Will jumped up. "He must be sick or — or something." Then looking again over the hot fields—"It's such a *con-founded* hot stretch," he complained.

"Give it up then," suggested Emily. "I'll go. Have you got a message for Sid? I'll take it."

Will ground his heel into the dry earth. "Oh, it isn't anything you could tell him."

"Then," said Emily, with another swift glance toward Ned, after which she fell to plaiting her hat ribbon into precise little folds, "I don't see but you'll have to go and let *me* stay here."

Just then the slight veering of the breeze brought to their ears the sound of voices from the little group of women way down at the far end of the lane. After watching them for a moment Emily exclaimed, as Mrs. Ben's large figure came into unobstructed view, "Why, there's Mrs.

Tewksbury — what are they doing, I wonder? — oh, I remember! Mother said Mrs. Tewksbury was going to give a lot of lilacs to trim the church. You won't have to go to the house now!" If Will had not been so occupied with his own thoughts he might have detected the note of disappointment under her words.

"I'll go over anyway and see Sid for a few minutes,— I'll stop here on my way back so's to walk home with you."

"All right," answered Emily with renewed animation, watching Will as he started for the house, a secret apprehension urging him on his unwilling walk with as much energy as the heat and certain happenings of the previous night had left in him.

As he neared the house, Miss Fitch chanced to pause a moment in her task of pulling lilacs, to look about her, and observed him. "Some one goin' to your house," she informed Mrs. Tewksbury.

Mrs. Ben's glance followed Miss Fitch's pointing finger. "It's Will Hubbard, Mis' Peabody's nephew f'm Litchfield. Sid 'n' him 's great chums!" Mrs. Tewksbury made no attempt to conceal the swelling pride within her. "The Hubbards is one of the first famblys there. I onderstand Will's been jest the least mite wild — oh, nothin' t' *hurt*, y' know,— jest got in with some comp'ny his folks didn't think wuz good fer anyone o' *his* connections t' 'sociate with, so they sent him to the country to his Aunt Julia's fer awhile."

"When I see how much trouble some childern does give their folks," Miss Fitch interposed, "I ain't so sure that it's the *worst* thing in the world to be an old maid."

"Miss Peabody's jest tickled to death 'cause Will 'n' Sid's got to be sech friends, 'cause Sid's so quiet 'n' proper behaved."

"Hear Sid's goin' to hev a job in the bank," ventured Mrs. Tibbits, with thinly veiled curiosity.

"He's goin' to hev a *position* in the bank," corrected Mrs. Ben — "I didn't know it had got out yet. It's astonishin' how news does leak out. Yes, he's goin' to be a book keeper — I b'lieve that's what 'tis. Mis' Peabody's so in-

terested in *Sid*,—of course it's jest an openin' fer him to git in an' learn the bizness."

"Thought *Sid* went to collidge to learn doctorin'?" said Mrs. Pettigrew, winking slyly at Miss Fitch.

"*Sid* changed his mind," Mrs. Tewksbury replied, with some asperity. "He's goin' to be a banker. It's more genteeler, 'n' the's more money in the bankin' business than the' is in doctorin'."

"Oh," exclaimed Mrs. Lunn, "then it's bankin' he's studyin' at nights. I thought t'was funny if he was hev'in' to study about *doctorin'*."

"Doctorin'! no indeed!" retorted Mrs. Ben, with lofty contempt. "*Of course*, *Sid* knows ev'ry thing the' is to know 'bout *that*."

"How long's Mis' Peabody's nephew goin' to stay?" asked Mrs. Tibbitts, meekly conciliatory — awed in spite of herself by Mrs. Ben's intimacy with banks, bankers, and scions of "first famblys."

Mrs. Tewksbury replied with an air of pleasant condescension to Mrs. Tibbitts' question, "I *guess* the best part o' the summer. I *hope* he does, seein' *Sid* 'n' him hev took sech a fancy to one another. It's a splendid thing fer both of 'em. The' ain't many round here that's *Sid's kind* — 'n' he bein' so stedd' 'n' moral in his ways is jest the sort *Will's* Pa 'n' Ma 'd pick out fer *him* t' make friends with."

"Ned Cutler seems a quiet nice sort o' boy;" this was Miss Fitch's second blunder of the morning,—"*sh'd* think *Will* Hubbard 'd be makin' friends with *him* too."

"Artemishy Fitch! you ain't got common sense! You do git me out o' patience! Ned Cutler! What's he *know*? *Nothin'*! What's he *got*? *Nothin'*! What'll he ever *be*? *Nothin'* 'cept a drudgin' ign'rant farmer! Young men in s'ciety sech as *Will* Hubbard b'longs to don't 'sociate with Ned Cutlerses!—My *Sid's* a few pegs above sech as him, thank goodness!"

While Mrs. Tewksbury was comparing *Sid* and Ned Cutler, with so much disparagement of the latter, Emily was

watching him from her place beside the lilac trees. Until Will was well out of hearing she stood quietly, watching Ned going on so perseveringly with his work, her face — if facial expressions are to be trusted — indicating a very different opinion of that young man's merits from the one held by Sid's mother.

At last she called softly, "Ned! — Ned!" then a little louder, "N-e-d!"

At the third call Ned raised himself from his work, and turning, looked at her. There was a slight pause of mutual embarrassment. Then Emily spoke again.

"Hello," she called to him.

"Hello, Em'ly," another pause of increasing confusion. Then Ned added, "Is that you?"

Emily broke into a little laugh, and the situation was relieved of its awkwardness.

"Don't you think it looks like me?" she said.

"Where's Will gone?" Ned asked.

"Oh, then you saw us all the time! Why didn't you speak?"

"I don't know, hardly; — I guess I thought you wouldn't care about my speaking, one way or the other."

"But I *do* care! I'm coming over where you are to talk to you." She took a step or two in his direction, lifting her skirts daintily from the plowed ground.

"You'll get your shoes full of dirt," Ned objected.

Emily advanced a few steps. "I don't mind *that*."

"It's too hot for you out here in the sun."

Emily stopped. "I think *you* don't care about talking to *me*!" She turned back to the lane, and picking up the sunhat she had thrown upon the ground, she put it on, pulling the lace ruffles down over her eyes. "I'm going," she said in a choked voice; "good-bye." She started quickly down the lane toward Mrs. Ben Tewksbury and the other women.

"Em'ly!" with a few long strides Ned stood in front of her. "Why, *Em'ly*! — I'd rather talk to you than — than

anything!" He tried to look into her face, but it was down bent and covered by the drooping ruffles of the sunhat. "I thought you knew that, Em'ly."

"I used to think so," she breathed, rather than spoke; "but for a long time now you"—she seemed to find some difficulty in going on,—“you haven't seemed friendly at all like—like you used to.”

The young man grew a shade paler under the heavy coat of tan that bronzed his skin. He was silent for a moment. When he spoke there was a ring of bitterness in his voice.

"I'm getting older," he said, "and I see a good many things pretty clear that I didn't use to understand."

"I don't know what you mean," murmured the girl. "It seems to me that everything's just the same as they've always been—except *you*."

"Things *are* just the same,—and they'll keep on being the same, I suppose, only—I never saw them in their right light until lately. Getting my eyes opened to the truth *has* changed *me*, maybe."

"Oh," was Emily's faint response, which barely reached Ned's ears, so low the head with its lace ruffled cover had drooped.

"I never used to think about the difference between us," Ned went on rapidly. "We were just 'Em'ly,' and 'Ned' and I didn't know there was another girl in the Corners—or any where else. Somehow, I thought it was the same with you about me—and that it would just keep on that way until some day—"

There was a silence; his gray eyes darkening with the shadows of pain, gazed away over the landscape, seeing nothing of it, seeing only the first terrible awakening of youth to life's inequalities and injustices.

Ned's voice again took up his heart burden. "I see now that we're not 'Em'ly' and 'Ned' at all. You are Miss Emily Peabody, the daughter of the man who owns the best part of the bank—except Judge Witherspoon, the richest man in the town—and I'm only Ned Cutler, a country lout

without a penny to his name and no prospect of ever being anything different."

He looked with scorn at his coarse boots covered with mud, his rough, ill-fitting clothing, his clinched hands hardened with labor and stained with the morning's toil. What he could not see was that the rough garb covered a form which, despite them, showed itself to be one of symmetry and vigorous strength; that the head was well shaped and well poised above the broad shoulders; that the hands under their marks of toil were shapely and that the features were well cut and of marked character. Ned was alive only to his shortcomings.

"So I've come to see," he went on, "that we must go different ways and the less we talk together the better it will be. You belong with a different sort—with people whose folks have money, people who have been to college, '*gentlemen*'—like your cousin Will and Sid Tewksbury."

"Oh!" broke in Emily, dashing the sunhat up from her face, disclosing a pair of flashing eyes wet with tears, "I hate Sid Tewksbury! I hate him! I hate him! I *hate* him!"

Ned stared at her in wonder. "Why, it's reported all round that you're engaged to marry Sid and that your Pa and Ma favor it."

"So they do — *that's* true enough — but I'll never marry Sid,—never, *never!* and I didn't think that *you*, Ned Cutler, could ever — could ever" — she covered her face with both hands and burst into tears.

"Em'ly! what do you mean? It can't be that you like an ignorant poor common-looking chap like me better than you do such a college dandy as Sid?"

"Oh, Ned!" cried Emily, clasping her hands and looking at him with blushing fervor; "you look better in your worst old clothes than Sid does in his very best! — and you *are* better! — and you're smarter! — and you're nicer every way! — only —"

Ned's face, which had been glowing with delighted sur-

prise at her praises, fell blankly at that hesitating "only."

"Only you've never had a chance."

"That's it — I've never had a chance. Perhaps I never *shall* have. I'm afraid I'll never get you, Emily,—I'm afraid I'll never get you."

Involuntarily Ned threw out his hand with a helpless, despairing gesture. The girl seized and clung to it. "Isn't there *something* you can do, Ned? Can't you *try*?"

"Yes!" he answered, throwing his head up with sudden determination, "I can *try*,—and I *will*!"

"Why, Ned," said Emily, after an instant, half laughing to hide her own breakdown, "I believe you're crying, too!"

"I believe I am," he answered, in a tone of extraordinary joyfulness. "I haven't cried since I was a little shaver. It always did me good then and I wouldn't wonder if it will now. I've felt as if I *wanted* to cry for months but somehow, I couldn't. When I found out you really did like me better'n any one it broke me all up."

"I thought you knew it all the time!"

"I didn't," he declared, "and I'm afraid I can't believe it after you're gone,—I'll think I was dreaming, maybe."

"I'll tell you what to do then," cried Emily happily; "cut our initials on this lilac tree — N. C. and E. P.—and when you think you are dreaming you can come and look at them."

Ned took his knife from his pocket and proceeded with alacrity to carry out Emily's suggestion, following the letters, as they grew and came to an end under his blade, with a smile trembling on his lip and brightening his eyes.

"Some day," he declared, "I'm going to come here and cut another 'c' out, after this 'p'."

"And if anything *should* happen that you never can, Ned," she answered gravely, "I needn't ever have *any other* letter after it, you know."

Then Ned grasped her hand in his once more, holding it tight, and they looked at each other long, without speaking. In their eyes shone the light of unsullied love and faith yet untried.

CHAPTER VII

TO-DAY AND A MEMORY

A SWIRL of dust, a whirl of shining red and black wheels, a flurry of prancing hoofs, and a large jovial voice calling out, "Hey-there! how's everybody?" brought Ned and Emily to a sense of the fact that there was at least one other person in the world besides themselves and that that person was observing them.

Justice Witherspoon had with some difficulty brought his horse to a standstill. The Judge always drove a speedy piece of horse flesh, but the present one was considerably swifter than anything which had previously made its appearance in Columbia Corners. It was confidently whispered about that it had been a "racer." This suspicion of a sporty past proved decidedly damaging to the character of the horse and reflected its shadow upon the already tarnished reputation of his master.

"Like horse, like man," the ladies frequently whispered with pursed lips and lifted eyebrows, each time with an air as of having made an original and striking epigram.

When the Justice was seen in summer, flying past, clad in gray linen and panama hat, or in winter, swathed in furs and to the tune of furious sleigh bells, it was said with the force of positive conviction that "the devil did cert'nly look out fer his own — anyone but Jestice Withersp'n'd a hed his neck bruk fifty times."

"Didn't know but something was the matter over at your place," said the Justice, addressing Ned, as he and Emily came down the lane toward him. "It's so long since you've been 'round to see me." A keen glance from under his bushy eyebrows discerned traces of tears and emotion that, taken together with the attitude in which he had first

seen them, enabled the Judge to form a pretty close guess as to the nature of what had just been passing between them.

In answer to the Judge's inquiry Ned explained that nothing was in any way amiss, but that work about the farm had kept him so busy that he had had little time for anything else.

"Well, don't get discouraged," said the Justice, cheerily. "Some of the best men we've ever had in the country had to get on under just such difficulties. You've got a chance to be president of the United States yet."

Ned smiled faintly, as in duty bound, at a sally that was evidently meant as a friendly encouragement, but no answer occurred to him that did not seem superfluous.

"Goin' home, Em'ly?" continued the Judge; "jump in and I'll give you a ride. Ain't afraid of bein' run away with, are you?"

"Oh, no," responded Emily, with an amused smile of understanding, first at the horse and then at the Judge, who was grinning broadly; "but I've got a message from Ma to Mrs. Tewksbury." The rose color of her cheeks flamed brighter and she involuntarily looked at Ned—"I came near forgetting all about it!"

Neither the blush nor the look escaped the keen eyes of the Judge but he only said, "I'm afraid I can't wait for you—I'm in a big hurry to get back to the office." The horse began to cavort, the Justice with difficulty holding him in, asking Ned, as if with an afterthought of casual politeness, "How's your mother?"

"She's well, thank you, Judge."

"Uncle Dan'l well, too?"

"Yes, thank you."

"Ah-m-a quiet there, Flyer, quiet!—s'pose your sister Priscilla's all right?—beats all how I always come nigh forgittin' Priscilla. Don't have to work too hard this hot spell, does she?"

"She and Ma always have plenty to do—but she's all right, thank you, Judge."

"Why, Ned," exclaimed Emily, "that's Priscilla and your mother coming along the road now, isn't it?"

"Yes," Ned answered, watching the familiar figures as they approached; "they manage to get over to the lane about every day."

"Guess I'll wait and have a little talk with your mother — it's quite a while since I've seen her — don't know but I may as well get out and tie the horse in the shade — it won't hurt her to stand for a spell."

Ned opened his eyes in surprise — puzzled in the effort to reconcile the Justice's haste of the moment before with the unlimited amount of time he seemed suddenly to have left over on his hands; but he assured the Judge, who was clambering briskly from his cart, that he knew his mother would be glad to see him.

"You and Judge Witherspoon have got to be pretty good friends, haven't you?" asked Emily, watching him as he crossed the road to tie his horse in the shade of a big maple tree.

"I don't mind telling you now," Ned burst out enthusiastically, "that Judge Witherspoon has been lending me books out of his library and he's helping me about studying, too! It's a secret — no one knows about it except Ma and Priscilla."

Emily clapped her hands together softly, in delight. "Are you *really studying*?" she cried. "Oh, I'm so *glad*! I *know* we'll all be proud of you some day!"

"Now Em'ly," remonstrated Ned, "don't *you* say anything about my being president!"

"I won't," said Emily, laughing; "I'm going to meet Priscilla and your mother and tell them you've let me into the *family secret*."

She ran gaily away to join the two women who were now very near the lane, while the Justice, having hitched his horse to a convenient fence post, rejoined Ned.

"Ned," he began abruptly — "I think you're a pretty good sort of a boy — and I wouldn't wonder if some day you'd amount to something — that is, if you don't go and do some-

thing foolish. You know lots of the folks round here think you've slipped a few cogs — they don't know you as well as me and " — with a quizzical glance — "and Em'ly do; but you must see, my boy, — about Em'ly, — that it's out of the question for you two to think of each other. You've got a mighty long row to hoe before you come to the harvest."

"We know that. Of course, we know we can't think of such a thing as getting married for years — maybe never; but we can go on caring about each other, and," Ned averred stoutly, "we're going to. Don't try to stop us, Judge, because I shan't have half as much courage to try and amount to something in the world if I can't think about Em'ly."

"I won't say another word, Ned, only, I must warn you to be prudent. No marriage on the sly or any such nonsense. It wouldn't be fair to Em'ly and it would cut your career k-siz! You intending to let folks know about this understanding between you?"

"I haven't had time to think anything about it — I've only just found it out myself," Ned confessed, a bit bashfully; "if you think we ought to tell —"

"By no means — by no means," interrupted the Judge hastily. "It might make things unpleasant for the girl — and — and if nothing ever comes of it" — the troubled and sympathetic thought flashed through the Judge's mind that nothing of their young hopes ever *would* be realized — "why — the less that's been said the better."

"It's lucky it was me and not one o' them telegraph instruments in petticoats," he added, with a chuckle and a glance at the women far down the lane, "that saw you squeezin' hands under the lilack trees. They couldn't no more help tellin' of it 'n' a clam kin help squirtin' water."

Mrs. Cutler, having been told by Emily that the Judge was waiting purposely to speak with her was in a state of nervous perturbation.

"I wouldn't mind a bit, only on account o' you 'n' Priscilla bein' with me. He *hes* been awful kind to Ned 'n' t'wouldn't do no harm fer an old woman like me to be in

his comp'ny, but I don't think it's jest proper fer you 'n' Priscilla."

"Now, Ma," remonstrated Priscilla gently; "it wouldn't surprise *me* if Justice Witherspoon wasn't *half* as bad as folks make out he is."

"Why, I've *been* talking to him and he's just as nice and pleasant as he can be," said Emily, mischievously.

"I've heerd said thet them kind o' people is often the pleasantest seemin' kind," replied Mrs. Cutler; "but mebbe the' won't be no harm done by just meetin' him casyul. You 'n' Priscilla kin keep together 'n' walk behind me 'n' I'll do the talkin' with the Jestice."

To the Justice's cordial greeting Mrs. Cutler responded with timid amiability, even going to the daring length of giving him her hand out of pure thankfulness for what he had done for Ned.

"You've been so good to Ned, Mr. Withersp'n," she said, "I ain't had no way o' thankin' you before — an' I ain't got no proper way *now* ez fur ez that goes."

"Anything I've done ain't worth mentioning," the Judge protested, giving her frail fingers a grasp whose heartiness made her wince. "Just gives the boy a little encouragement, that's all." He was looking beyond the old lady, at Priscilla, who from a safe distance was acknowledging his presence by a guarded smile and a small bow of extreme formality.

Small as the bow was it encouraged the Judge to address her directly. "That's a pretty lot o' flowers you've got. Out o' your Ma's garden, ain't they?"

"Oh, yes," stammered Priscilla, confused at finding herself talking at short range with the redoubtable Justice. "They're all Ma's growing."

"It's a fact — I don't see such a flower garden as her's in all my drivin' about." The Judge was by this time close at Priscilla's side, dividing his attentions between her startled brown eyes and her load of flowers. Mrs. Cutler looked on with a feeling of helpless panic at the bold manœuvre which so completely upset her strategic plan of

interposing herself as a safeguarding barrier between the young women and the vague but none the less terrifying wickednesses of the Judge. Even the compliment to her garden failed to quiet her fears, although it must be confessed it went a long way toward modifying them.

"My, but they're sweet!" the Justice exclaimed, bending his head toward the basket until it was in close proximity to Priscilla's plain little straw sunhat. "I always did have a likin' for flowers."

"*Why*, I didn't suppose *you'd* care anything about flowers!" Priscilla was surprised into saying.

"Didn't you? Why not, Priscilla?" the Justice asked quickly.

"Oh, because — because," Priscilla floundered in distress at her own tactless slip, "just because I didn't think so."

The Justice pulled an early pink from the basket and sniffed its perfume with vigorous relish.

"Because you thought I was too hardened an old sinner to care about such things?" There was a roguish twinkle in his eyes but it was lost upon Priscilla in her confusion. The deep rose of the pink which the Justice was sniffing with so much delight paled beside the blush that surged into her cheeks. That flush certainly made Priscilla look very pretty.

"Oh, Justice Witherspoon, you know I wouldn't say anything like that!" Priscilla's protest was tremulous to the verge of tears — she had unwittingly displayed a disparaging opinion of him — and he had been so good to Ned!

"There now — you needn't feel a bit bad. I ain't the least mite mad about it." The Judge's tone was reassuring and he gave vent to a genial laugh. "There's a lot more truth than poetry in what you was a-thinkin' of me. I admit I ain't got any wings sproutin', that is, no reg'lar orthodox ones of a pattern that'd pass muster in Columby Corners."

"Now, Jestice," interposed Mrs. Cutler, coming to the rescue with a tact which was the offspring of a tender heart; "we all know you're only foolin'. Natchelly, you bein'

jest a *man* we didn't s'pose you keered fer flowers—the' ain't many of 'em does. Now I know y' like 'em so well, I'll send ye a bokay offen. We was takin' these to Mr. Cutler—but you kin have 'em! I know he'd be willin'—you've ben sech a good friend to Ned."

"Ma'am," replied the Justice gravely, "I wouldn't take *one* o' these seein' they're intended for Mr. Cutler. I've heard mor'n once how much care you take of his last restin' place."

"I've come 'bout ev'ry day—'n' often ez she kin Priscilla comes with me. Most folks thinks we're ter'ble foolish." Mrs. Cutler sighed faintly, remembering all the opposition she had met in making these visits. "But it don't seem that way to *us*. It's a pleasure fer us to come 'n' I b'lieve *he* likes to hev us. I'm always sorry when the lilacks is gone—I wuz always fond of 'em, 'n' Mr. Cutler—he jest *loved* 'em. He thought the' want no flower so sweet 'n' perty ez lilacks. We was married in lilack time, 'n' I remember how we ust offen 'n' offen t' walk up 'n' down the lane admirin' 'n' smellin' of the flowers. 'Twas lilack time when he was dyin' and when he was too weak to move er most to speak, he'd hev the bed pushed clost to the window so's he could git the scent of 'em blowin' into the room. Sence he died I've put a bunch of lilacks on his grave ev'ry day so long as the trees was blossomin'. Seems to me 's if he knows when I put 'em there 'n' I kin always seem to hear him say, 'Ain't they jest beautiful? . . . jest sweet 'n' beautiful like they was on our weddin' day?' Such times is all ways a great comfort, fer I can't seem to b'lieve but what he's right here with me."

The gentle voice ceased for a moment; the faded eyes, long since wept dry of tears gazed raptly into space, seeing there embodied the lost husband of her youth.

Presently she turned to Ned. "You're like your Pa, Ned. You look like him 'n' you *be* like him. Some folks say ye'll never amount to much fer that reason. Yer Pa couldn't never make money—that was agin him in some folks' eyes. I s'pose 'tain't right—but some how," she ended with a

plaintive sigh and a deprecatory look at Judge Witherspoon, "I'd ruther hev Ned like his father — even if he ain't never rich."

"Ma'am," said the Justice, after a vigorous blowing of his nose, "we'll hope Ned'll keep on bein' like his father — 'n' have the good luck to make a little money into the bargain."

CHAPTER VIII

SOUNDING MOSTLY DISCORDS

So absorbed had the Justice, Mrs. Cutler, Priscilla and Emily been in each other that the approach of Emily's cousin Will accompanied by Sid Tewksbury had not been noticed until the young men were actually in their midst.

"Good morning, Judge," said Sid, with great civility. He lifted his hat in extreme politeness to Emily; the others he ignored with insolent intention.

A hot flame of resentment rushed through Ned at this slight to his mother and Priscilla. Sid was well aware of the feeling he had aroused in Ned and he was inwardly exulting in being able to humiliate him before Emily.

Mrs. Cutler spoke up quickly. "We'd best be goin', Priscilla, 'n' Ned orto git on with his work." Her words to him Ned understood as a pleading and a warning to avoid any trouble with Sid and he answered reassuringly. "All right, mother, I'll get to work right away."

At her mother's first words Priscilla had started on up the lane. In an instant the Justice was beside her.

"Let me carry that basket for ye, Priscilla. If you 'n' your Ma don't object I'll go along with ye. I ain't been up this lane since the day of your Pa's fun'ral. That's — about — eighteen years ago. You wasn't much of a girl then." He turned an interested gaze upon her. "Lord, how time does fly! I was a pretty good-lookin', decent sort of a youngish chap then and you was a little girl with long ringlets. Now I'm an old duffer, thin in the matter of hair, thick in the matter o' waist, scant in the matter of Godliness, and *you* —"

"And I'm an old maid!" Priscilla finished his sentence with a demure smile in her eyes. "Yes, time does fly."

Before Priscilla was well aware of what she was doing she had surrendered her basket to the Justice and found herself walking beside him, listening to his genial, sympathetic voice with a sense of pleasure and interest quite incompatible with her inbred disapproval of him as a character of confirmed habits and ways of living that were regarded with favor by his Satanic Majesty and his followers only.

Mrs. Cutler, in consternation at the sight of Priscilla actually alone with the Justice, hastened after them and Emily, stopping only to call over her shoulder, "Will, you needn't wait for me," and, "I'm going to have a visit with your mother, Ned," went quickly after Mrs. Cutler, linking arms with her, helping her affectionately over the stubbly ground.

Sid, switching the grass with a light cane, plainly betrayed his annoyance and chagrin as he saw Emily and Judge Witherspoon walking away in such friendly intimacy with the women he had tried to belittle. Then he turned to Will. "I thought we could enjoy a talk here in peace and quiet," he said, "but as my father's property is monopolized for the present by others we'll have to walk along the road."

"You have the privilege," said Ned, answering what was so evidently intended for him, "of walking anywhere you like, but as to this being your father's property — you know that hasn't been settled yet."

"It will be before long," retorted Sid, "and when it is, it won't be healthy for you if I catch you here."

"Oh, well, when that time comes it'll be soon enough for you to toot your horn," Ned answered with a half smile of sarcastic amusement that served to increase Sid's vexation.

"Oh, come on, Sid," Will broke in as Sid was about to answer. "What's the use of keeping up a chin racket?"

But at this moment Sid's glance lighted upon the letters which Ned had so recently cut in the lilac tree. He pointed to them with his cane, his eyes snapping angrily. "'N. C.'

—that's you I suppose and it's easy to guess who 'E. P.' is. Did you cut those initials on that tree?"

Ned, standing carelessly at ease, made no reply.

"Answer me," Sid went on furiously. "Have you had the cheek to link her name with yours? Answer me!" He advanced to Ned, standing passively by, and lifted the cane to strike him.

Ned, reaching up as the cane descended, easily caught it, and snapping it in two, tossed the broken pieces out into the field.

"Don't make a bigger fool of yourself than you can help, Sid," he said, and turning on his heel went back to his work, leaving Sid quivering with rage and resentment.

"I'll pay him off for that," he muttered.

"You'll have to find some way besides trying to lick him — he'd pummel the life out of you," was Will's candid, if not very flattering advice.

"I'll get even with him all right! You don't suppose Emily *let* him cut out the letters, do you?"

"Not by a jug full! If I thought she had I'd tell Em's mother pretty quick. The fellow's soft on her, I suppose, and just cut the letters to see how they'd look. I've written my initials with girls' lots of times, when I've been moony on them. But this bunch of talk don't settle our programme for to-night. Are you coming with me on the racket or not?"

"I'd like to — but I'm afraid. See here, Will, we're taking big chances on being found out."

"Oh, that's the only trouble with you; you haven't any nerve."

"You think I haven't? I could tell you some things that would make you change your mind."

"Then what are you scared about? If we've got out of the house and in again as many times as we have without being caught we're not likely to be to-night, are we?"

"That isn't what bothers me. There's going to be a crowd there you say."

"Yes, old Thibeu's daughter is coming home — she's

going to have some girls there. There's going to be a dance. We'll have a dickens of a good time."

"That's what I'm afraid of — there'll be so many there there might be someone who would know us."

"Know us? Pshaw! who's going to know *us* in that gang? and old Thibeu's never bothered so much as to ask our names."

"If he had of course we wouldn't have told him."

"Well, *no* — not our *own*, of course."

"If we go to-night we'd better be ready — we'll have to tell the girls some name to call us. What names'll we give?"

"Oh, you call me Sam Brown and I'll call you Jim Smith."

"No," said Sid, his eyes slowly narrowing; "you can call me — Ned Cutler."

Will gave him a quick look, then laughed. "You ain't so slow," he said, with approval.

CHAPTER IX

POSSESSION BY FORCE

OVER the fields, coming from the Ben Tewksbury barns, a small cavalcade was proceeding in the direction of the lane. Sid, watching it for a few minutes, finally said: "It's father and all the men from the farm. I'll bet he's going to do it after all — I thought he'd weaken before he got started."

"Weaken about what?" asked Will.

"About taking possession of the lane to-day. He's going to cut down the trees and plough up the ground."

"Whew! That'll kick up a rumpus, won't it?"

"I suppose so, but the lane's ours by rights and father's only doing what he ought to have done years ago."

"Perhaps we'd better get out," said Will with some apprehension.

"Who's afraid *now*?" said Sid mockingly. "You can do as you like — I'm going to stay," looking at Ned working near at hand in the field, with a vindictive light in his eyes. "I want to see how Ned Cutler'll like it."

The businesslike-looking procession now nearing the lane consisted of six men besides Ben Tewksbury himself, each man carrying a heavy axe, ground to its sharpest edge. Following the men two teams of strong farm horses were being driven, one pair drawing a plow, the other a stump-pulling machine.

They came on slowly but with steady purpose, drawing nearer and nearer to the proposed scene of action.

Sid and Will stood waiting, curious to see what would follow.

Ned, his back to the approaching party, worked on, unconscious.

Off in the field near the wood patch Daniel Tewksbury still pursued his toil and the thudding of the axes as the men chopped their wood in the edge of the timber land was the only sound breaking the drowsy quiet of the summer day.

The flower gatherers at the far end of the lane had pretty well stripped the trees in the vicinity and were sitting beside their overflowing baskets, resting, preparatory to their going home.

Not far from them and affording them abundant matter for surprise, curiosity, amusement and disapproval, were Mrs. Cutler and Priscilla, Emily and Justice Witherspoon, carefully removing all wilted or faded flowers from Mr. Cutler's grave and replacing them from Priscilla's stock of freshly cut pansies, mignonette, and spicy pinks — coaxed into early blooming in the sunniest spot in the garden — but it was Mrs. Cutler alone who gathered the great bunch of lilacs and placed it in the big jar at the head of the mound.

For many long months after Mr. Cutler's burial, the sting of the disrespect shown to the man she so tenderly loved had rankled in her breast.

Yet in the daily visits which only the nearness of his resting place made possible she had found a solace and strength which had supported her through many a trying hour; so that what had seemed in the beginning an unmitigated trial she had come to look upon as a kind dispensation — not alone to her but to him who in life had found his greatest happiness in being near her.

As the ominous mutterings between Ben and Daniel rose, each spring, into violent threats of taking forcible possession of the lane, cutting down the trees and plowing up the ground, Mrs. Cutler trembled; for she well knew that when that time came, if it ever *did* come, the angry process would not spare the mound which had been her loving care through all the long years of her widowhood. The bare thought of such desecration seemed to set the sharp edge of the plough through her own heart.

Mrs. Lunn, Mrs. Tibbitts, Miss Fitch, Mrs. Pettigrew and Mrs. Ben Tewksbury were in the height of their discussion.

"He's atchelly puttin' flowers on Mr. Cutler's grave," exclaimed little Mrs. Tibbitts. "I d' know what in the world t' make out of it!"

"Ez a *rule*," said Miss Fitch, "when a man puts flowers onto the tomb of a dear departed he's got his eye on the relict."

"Yes, but they don't gener'ly wait eighteen years before startin' into the flower bisniss," Mrs. Pettigrew chuckled as if over amusing recollections.

"I should think," said Mrs. Lunn with severity, "that Mis' Cutler wuz too old to be suit'ble fer the Jestice."

"Maybe it's Emily," Mrs. Tibbitts suggested timidly.

"Em'ly! why she's young 'nuff t' be his daughter," exclaimed Miss Fitch.

"I've noticed," laughed Mrs. Pettigrew, "that when a widower er old bach. gits t' Jedge Withersp'n's time o' life, they 'most always hev a parsheality fer the daughter age."

"I guess," said Mrs. Ben Tewksbury, bridling, "the Jestice 'ud be wastin' his time if he was after Em'ly."

At this moment the single heavy stroke of an axe against timber broke upon the sultry quiet. It echoed across the fields and died in space. No one seemed to notice it, and the sound was not at once repeated.

The men and teams had at last reached the lane and had halted.

"Now," commanded Ben, in a high state of excitement, "you men fall to and cut down every tree in the blasted lane. Soon as ye kin git in with the plow, Eb Williams, rip'er f'm end t' end, 'n' you, Jim Perry, git after the stumps."

The men seemed to hold back, as if uncertain.

"Say, Ben," said Jim Perry, "you sure enough ain't goin' to back out?"

"*Back out?* thunder 'n' lightnin', no! I mean what I say. Let 'er go."

One of the men, more ambitious than the others, stepped forward and lifting his axe brought it down upon the nearest lilac tree with that resounding blow which had reverberated along the lane and which, if heard, was not understood by those within the radius of its sound.

Ned, roused by the noise of the arriving men and horses and by his uncle's loud and angry voice, had looked up from his work, divining upon the instant, though scarcely able to believe his uncle's intentions.

It was not until the farm hand's axe fell, half severing one of the cherished lilac trees that he spoke, bounding forward, his face tense and horror-stricken.

"Uncle Ben!" he cried. "Uncle Ben! What are you doing?"

"'Tain't none o' *your* business *what* I'm doin'," retorted Ben Tewksbury, but I don't mind tellin' you that I'm takin' p'session o' *my* *propety*—'n' I'd like to see any one pervert me."

"Oh, Uncle Ben, think twice," Ned cried in anguished distress; "think twice before you strike once. It's easy to cut the trees down but you can't put them back."

"I don't *want* 'em put back," roared his uncle angrily. "I want ev'ry dod-blasted one of 'em *down*—'n' they're goin' to *come* down."

"That's right, father," drawled Sid, "you've started out to get your rights at last; *stick to it*, and just to oblige *me*, begin on *this* one." He stepped forward and put his hand on the tree upon which Ned had such a short time since cut his and Emily's initials.

"I don't care where, s'longs they *do* begin. Here," turning to the men who with rustic familiarity had dropped all work and were listening with open-mouthed curiosity and interest; "shut yer mouths 'n' git a hustle on ye; this tree's the fust one—down with it."

A few lusty blows, each one of which seemed to cleave

Ned's heart and numb it with the deadly fear that its fate was prophetic of his and Emily's hopes, brought the tree toppling to the ground.

"Pitch into the others now," shouted Ben; "the quicker it's done the better I'll be suited."

The men fell to work with a will and under their ringing blows the trees went crushing down. Eb Williams drove into the lane and setting the sharp prow of his plough into the earth started down the lane toward the far end.

The ringing blows of the axes went pealing along the lane and across the fields like a call to battle.

"What's that?" cried Mrs. Cutler in alarm, rising from her loving task, the last stalk of lilacs falling unheeded from her hands. "Some one's cuttin' trees that way!" Her hand shook as she pointed down the lane.

"Hark!" said Mrs. Ben Tewksbury, "what's that?"

"Sounds like cuttin' trees 'tother end o' the lane," said Miss Fitch.

"It's Ben! He's cuttin' down the lilac trees," cried Mrs. Ben, jumping up in excitement. The other women got quickly to their feet, trembling.

Daniel Tewksbury stopped in his tracks and scanned with startled eyes the length of the lane. He saw the men swaying to their work of destruction; he saw the lilac trees falling before their vigorous blows; he saw the horses dragging the plow. He gave a hoarse cry of rage, and clinching his hands, he shook the knotted fists in the direction of the men.

"It's Ben Tewksb'ry," he shrieked, in a frenzy of rage, "he's cuttin' down the lilac trees!"

Leaving his oxen standing in the furrow, he ran to the men at the edge of the timber.

"Gimme an axe," he shouted hoarsely, seizing one from the hands of a man who was using it. "Ben Tewksb'ry's cuttin' down the trees in Lilack Lane—he's started in to take force'ble p'session o' my prope'ty—but he shan't do it—he's got to *kill* me fust!"

With the axe over his shoulder, his face flaming red, his heart bursting with passion, his every movement showing fight to the death, he raced, panting, across the fields.

The men knew all about the quarrel. They dropped their work and ran after "Dan'l." They were bound to see and hear all that was coming to be seen and heard.

"Look at Dan'l Tewksb'ry!" screamed Mrs. Ben in terror. "There's goin' to be trouble—I've got to warn Ben!"

She started off, running as fast as her age and weight would permit; the other women, terrified, keeping close together, forgetting the gathered lilacs in their panic, ran after her, not knowing why nor what for.

Mrs. Ben was the first to reach the group gathered about Mr. Cutler's grave. She was all but breathless with excitement and the exertion of running.

"Mariar, what's the matter?" cried Mrs. Cutler. "Suthin's happened—what is it?" She clutched Mrs. Ben by the arm, catching the contagion of her excitement.

"This is what's happened," said Mrs. Ben, shaking off Mrs. Cutler's tremulous grasp. "Ben Tewksb'ry's hed the spunk to take p'session o' this lane at last. He's been kep' long enough out o' his own."

On she ran, puffing, toiling, to warn her husband of Daniel's coming. *Would* she get to him first? Yes, she would—her distance was the shorter. On, on she ran. She was ahead. Yes, she would get there first. What was the matter? The blood was rushing to her head. It was blinding her. She was too heavy on her feet. She was too old for running. The day had grown dreadfully hot.

She staggered; by an effort she grasped a lilac tree; she slipped down beside it. It was no use; Daniel would get there first.

The frightened women stopped in their race after Mrs. Tewksbury. Huddled at the grave with Mrs. Cutler, Priscilla, Emily and the Justice, they called attention to Daniel

and prophesied trouble. Justice Witherspoon's brows drew down till they almost concealed his eyes from view.

"Guess I'd better get down there," he said. "You women folks stay where ye are." He started down the lane with rapid strides.

"Ma," cried Priscilla, suddenly, "look! Look there!" Eb Williams' team was in sight, ploughing a furrow through the middle of the lane. "They're ploughing up the lane. They'll go right over Pa!"

"No they won't! No they won't neither! Not 'thout they drive right over *me*." Mrs. Cutler threw her frail body across the grave, her dim eyes glowing with a momentary return of the fire and energy of youth. At this moment they saw the Judge stop Eb Williams.

"I want one of these hosses," he said, deftly freeing the animal and backing it up beside the plow. He looked down the field. Daniel was nearing the lane. Using the plough for a mounting block he threw himself upon the horse's back, and turning to the astonished man shook his fist under his nose as he exclaimed: "You know me, Eb Williams! Don't you stir that plow another foot up this lane if you know what's good fer yourself!" With a "git-ap!" to the horse he was off, galloping furiously down the lane. He passed Mrs. Tewksbury, sufficiently recovered to be hurryin' on again, *but Dan'l Tewksbury would get there first!*

"Jestice, Jestice," she called, as he galloped past. "Don't let Dan'l Tewksb'ry hurt my Ben!"

But the Justice did not answer,—perhaps he did not hear her.

Daniel Tewksbury was drawing nearer. He could see the men plainly now. He could see Ned standing in impotent grief and anger. He could see Sid looking on with a sneer of triumph. He could see Ben directing the men. He could hear him giving orders. He saw the trees falling thick and fast. No one had noticed his coming.

Suddenly he stood within the lane.

"Uncle Dan'l!" cried Ned.

The men with one accord stopped work, all eyes, even Ben's and Sid's, were fixed upon Daniel Tewksbury and held there, so terrible was his aspect of fury. For an instant he was speechless. Then he burst forth in a voice shaking with passion: "What's this you're doin', Ben Tewksb'ry?"

"Guess it's easy enough fer ye t' see, Dan'l Tewksb'ry. I'm takin' what b'longs t' me, that's all!"

"You're a liar 'n' a thief 'n' y' know it," roared Daniel in reply. "You think b'cause you've hed better luck, 'n' 've got more money 'n' I hev that ye kin tramp on me ez ye like. But you'll find out ye can't do it! This lane's *mine* 'n' I'll see ye rottin' afore I'll let ye take it away f'm me."

"Ye needn't talk 'bout robbers 'n' liars," Ben, now at white heat, roared back. "B'cause I've been smarter 'n' come out ahead mor'n you hev, ye needn't out o' doggone mean jealousy try t' beat me out o' what b'longs t' me." He turned to the men. "Go on, you fellows—ain't I told ye already what to do? Lay into them trees."

The men, in obedience to the command, started forward, but Daniel leaped in front of them, his axe uplifted.

"I'll brain the first man 'at touches one of 'em!"

The men retreated in terror. Daniel, lowering his weapon, stepped back. Ben seized an axe from the hands of the man nearest him.

"Ye will, will ye?" he cried to Daniel. "I'll let ye see ye can't scare *me*!" Lifting the axe he swung a heavy blow that took the blade almost through the trunk and held it fast in the wood.

He had struck the tree nearest him, three or four down the line from where Daniel was standing. As the axe sunk into the wood a roar of rage as from a maddened animal burst from Daniel's lips. He raised his axe and started for Ben. A cry of warning and of horror broke from the lookers-on. Ben wrenched desperately at his blade, fastened in

the tree, but could not loose it. Daniel was almost upon him.

Just at that moment, or whether it was an instant before, the participants and spectators were too excited to notice, a horse dashed past and the Justice flung himself from his back. With one well directed blow Daniel was checked in his murderous onslaught. He went down a dead weight, his axe prone beside him.

Ben, his weapon at last freed, rushing forward upon his prostrate foe, was met face to face. Seizing the axe by the handle the Judge wrenched it from Ben's grasp, hurling him back, staggering, against a partly fallen tree.

Standing between the half-risen Daniel and the tottering Ben, the Judge cried out, unconsciously flourishing the axe as if ready for attack: "Keep back there, you boys, both of ye! I'm Jestice o' the Peace, 'n' by gravy! *I'm goin' to see that peace is kep'!*"

CHAPTER X

THE LURE OF WILD OATS

THAT night fell dark and cool after the sun's heat and the fire of men's futile passions. An occasional far star twinkled as if in mirth at the self-important strugglers on the little planet "earth." The silence was broken only by the voices of the trees—the sharp calling of the crickets—the resonant k-chugging of the bullfrogs. Shadows from the trees and banks along the way wrapped the roadside in dark wavering mystery under whose cover a bicycle was stealthily speeded toward the Ben Tewksbury house.

In a particularly black patch of shade just beyond the big, wide-open driveway gates, the rider slackened speed and threw himself from his wheel. He stood for an instant, listening, and peering toward the house through the darkness.

"He ought to be here by this time. What the devil's keeping him?" The angry whisper was the only discord in nature's harmonies of night. The irritated watcher strained his eyes through the gloom in which the house stood in sullen quiet.

"Funny there isn't any light in his window," the impatient watcher muttered, under his breath.

A match ignited with caution and held to the face of a watch threw an instant's light upward. It was quickly extinguished, but the flash had revealed the rider's identity. It was Will Hubbard.

"Eighteen after eleven! Rats! The shindy'll be half over before we get there! What's the matter with him anyway? Wonder if he's scared out after all and isn't going." After delivering these disjointed comments and queries, with uneasy pauses and restless shiftings of posi-

tion, Will put his fingers to his lips and gave a long, muffled hoot. It broke upon the stillness, enveloping the house like the far cry of an owl.

Five minutes passed—ten minutes. They seemed as many hours to the waiting Will. At last he whistled again—a little longer, a little more shrilly.

After an instant, the call was answered from the vicinity of the house, faintly.

"He's got a move on at last," muttered the disgruntled Will, with a sigh of relief.

Presently a figure, pushing a bicycle, loomed unnaturally tall in the darkness, close to the gate. The thickly grassed sod had deadened all sound of approach.

"St! St! I'm over here," Will called, in a penetrating whisper. "Come on!"

Mounting his wheel, Will pedaled swiftly away, followed by Sid, hugging the shadows, neither speaking until well out of sight and sound of the Tewksbury homestead. Then Will, circling back to Sid's side, spoke.

"What the devil made you so late? I didn't see any light in your room and I began to think you'd backed out of going."

"I couldn't get away any sooner. I gave them the study gag and went to my room, but father and mother were in such an excited state of mind I thought they would never settle down for the night. Mother kept coming to my door to talk over to-day's fuss."

"That was a hell of a fracas," said Will.

"I had to put my light out and pretend to be asleep. After a while they quieted down and I managed to get out without their knowing it."

"Lord but this is a beastly respectable dull hole!" Will's tone expressed the deepest disgust. "That fight to-day was a Godsend. With the dance at Thibau's to-night for a finish, it's the red letter day in my calendar since I was sent out here for the good of my health, which meant to separate me from a good time."

They rode for awhile in silence. Then Sid, with some

hesitation, revealed the state of his mind. "Say, Will," he said, "I'm getting a little shaky about going so often to Thibeau's place. It's too near home. Scot! Fancy someone seeing me there that would know who I am. It would be all over the place by morning."

"You can blame it all on me," said Will, cheerfully. "Just a little dance, even if the place *is* common, wouldn't be so bad for *me*. My folks would consider it mild. They're on to my curves, you know." With a sarcastic laugh he added: "You've gone in for the good Sunday-school boy gag, so you've got to be doing the pull-the-wool act all the time."

"I don't see the use," replied Sid, "of letting everybody know what you do. Put on the proper front and you can have all the fun you want without an everlasting row being kicked up over you."

"Oh—if you put it that way," assented Will, "but it would be too darn much trouble for *me*. I couldn't keep the hypocrisy mill working very long. It's only on your account I'm sneaking off like this to Thibeau's."

"You'd better make up your mind to keep under cover for your own sake," was Sid's advice, "or you'll wake up some day and find your picture turned to the wall."

Will's air of saucy bravado languished. Sid's words had evidently impressed him.

"Well," he said, finally, with reviving spirits, "we'll have a good time to-night, anyway."

The young men now addressed themselves to the business of covering the miles that still stretched between them and their destination. At top speed their bicycles flew over the road which had by this time become very well known to them.

"Thibeau's" differed in no salient features from the usual road house one has been accustomed to passing on country roads, especially those leading toward towns of any considerable size.

A signpost at the intersection of two roads close to Thibeau's bore directions for the traveler. Under the

painted hand with finger pointing back over the way Sid and Will had come the sign read: "Columbia Corners $6\frac{1}{2}$ miles"; toward the stretch of road in front of them, "Belvers 14 miles"; to the right, "Litchfield $7\frac{3}{4}$ miles"; to the left, "Union Junction 8 miles; Millwell $19\frac{1}{4}$ miles."

The place itself was a story and a half wooden structure painted white. The front of the main part of the building was made attractive by big windows and a door with a fancy glass top, the windows profusely ornamented with pictorial devices in black and gold and many startling colors setting forth the names and merits of sundry liquid refreshments calculated to entice the thirsty passer-by inside the Thibeau domain, there to part with more or less of his ready cash for that gentleman's benefit.

Various "wings" and "extensions" gave to the building a rambling and roomy appearance. A long shed extended rearward for the sheltering of teams, and a garden at one side set with numerous tables and chairs for the accommodation of patrons was effectually screened from public view by a high, thickly interlaced hedge. A bed or two and some scattered pots of geraniums and other bright-colored flowers gave a cheerful touch to the common surroundings, and a general air of prosperity was apparent. There could be no doubt that "business was good" at Thibeau's.

As Sid and Will drew near they could hear the sound of fiddles squeaking out lively dance music; lights were shining from many windows, the front doors stood open and a motley crowd was gathered outside them and within the barroom, drinking, with much noisy talking and laughing. All this was very enlivening to Sid and Will. The rough coarseness and freedom from restraint suited the strain of viciousness inherent in the moral makeup of both young men and which formed the common bond of sympathy which was fast making them what Sid's mother proudly proclaimed "great chums." Moreover they were pleased with themselves by thinking that they were extremely "smart." They had a contempt for slow fellows who went to bed regularly and throughout the day

plodded along at their tasks. *They* were no "Molly Coddles." "There was nothing slow about *them*." They were "fly"; they were "young men of the world"; "knew a thing or two," and so on in their mental estimate of their own delectable qualities. As they drew close to Thibeau's they swerved their wheels to the opposite side of the road and drove slowly past, sharply scrutinizing the crowd as far as it came within their range of vision.

"No one in sight that I know," said Sid, as soon as they were well past the road house. "I guess it's safe enough, but we'd better go in the back way and take a good look from there before we get inside."

"All right," responded Will; "if we *should* run onto anyone, it's easy enough to say we were out for a ride and just came in to see what was going on."

The bicycles were turned and sent spinning back past the house and into the buggy road leading to the rear of the house. Here the young men dismounted and through the windows made another careful eye reconnoiter of the assembled dance party. No familiar face was in sight and they slipped quietly in and mingled with the crowd.

Over the bar, Thibeau and an assistant were busy serving drinks to the standees. Thibeau happened to look up as Sid and Will came in and gave them a friendly nod. He did not know who they were, nor where they came from — nor care. They had become frequent patrons of his place of late. They spent money freely. They drank often. They stayed late playing cards and not infrequently played with other visitors, which kept them also late and drinking often — and Thibeau never sent them home. He believed in making things pleasant for his patrons so long as they were making a good profit for him.

In the hedge enclosed space outside men and women were sitting at tables, eating, drinking and smoking. Madame Thibeau and a young woman were flying back and forth with trays laden with refreshments. Will spoke to her as she passed a side door of the barroom leading kitchenward. She answered with pleasant effusiveness.

"Oh, yes, yes, certainly! At once they shall be taken care of;" and sent a reluctant chore boy, who was idling near, to put the bicycles in a place of safety. Sid and Will strolled over to the big extension at the back where numerous couples were keeping lively step to the strains of the fiddles. As they were looking on, Madame bustled back with her tray fresh laden. "You like the dancing?" she asked good-naturedly. "Ah, yes! When we are young we dance."

"A good many people seem to like it if they *aren't* so young," commented Will, looking around at the dancers.

"Ah, the old ones, they pretend; they make believe to themselves that they are young as ever," laughed Madame.

"That's a pretty girl," said Sid, quickly, as a dark-eyed young woman waltzed past.

"Yes? You think so?" Madame was pleased. "That is my daughter. Come in, I will acquaint you. Perhaps she will dance with you." She led the way, the young men following with alacrity. As the waltz ended, Madame beckoned her daughter to her. "Tina, the young gentlemen would dance; you can find partners for them? They are good customers of your father." With this, smiling, she left them, to resume her interrupted task of distributing refreshments to the hungry and thirsty.

Tina, left with the two young men with such scant ceremony, was in no wise abashed. From her childhood she had been used to men. As they came and went about her father's saloon they had called her a pretty little girl, and she had told them her name, and how old she was, and what Santa Claus had brought for her at Christmas. Very often she was induced to exchange a kiss, or lift her tiny skirts and execute a few dancing steps, for a penny. If she at any time objected, her unwillingness was usually overcome when the inducement was raised to two pennies or a nickel. Thibeau and Madame looked on and laughed. They saw no harm. As the girl grew up in bold and black-eyed beauty, with a ready tongue and forward manners, Thibeau and Madame still laughed. She was their Tina, their

pride; if the men liked to laugh and joke with her — well. A pretty young girl was bound to bring men around, and it was good for business. And was not the money all for Tina? She should have a fine set-out when she picked out some nice young fellow for a husband! To-night Tina stood before Will and Sid, her eyes bright, her cheeks flushed, a vivid picture of high health and animal spirits.

"Which one of you wants to dance with me?" she asked, with a toss of the head, a saucy smile and a straight glance from the bold, black eyes.

"I do!" answered both young men at once, with eager and evident admiration.

The girl looked first at one, then at the other. She was "sizing them up," and she knew they belonged to a station in life above the usual frequenters of her father's place.

After the brief instant of shrewd and silent scrutiny she spoke again with the pert audacity which to Will and Sid seemed very fetching.

"I'll go get another girl, and we'll draw lots to see who'll dance with *me!*"

"She's a *bird!*" was Will's comment as Tina tripped gaily away.

"Not so bad looking, either, if you happen to like brunettes. Blondes are more in my line," said Sid. Nevertheless, his glance followed Tina's movements with interest.

She came back to them presently, arm in arm with a young woman of fair complexion and rather ordinary attractions. "This is my chum," said Tina. "She will dance with one of you."

"My friend will take her; he likes blondes," said Will with a rude familiarity in which he felt warranted by the character of the place and gathering and the free manner of the girls themselves.

Tina tossed her head. "Oh, *does* he!" she cried out petulantly, casting a look of nettled vanity at Sid.

"Oh, come, Tine, you can't expect to have a mash on *everybody!*" laughed her companion, giving her a good-

natured push toward Will. The girl's coarse sally set the others laughing.

"If this dance is settled," said Sid, "I want you to give me the next one, Tina."

"I'm yours," was the ready answer.

"And will you be my partner—" Will paused at the loss for the girl's name.

"My name's Jennie. If you're pushed for time, Jen. All right, you're on my list for the next."

Just then the fiddlers struck up a waltz and they whirled away among the other gyrating couples. From the opposite side of the dance hall the young man who had been Tina's partner when Sid had first seen her watched the proceeding with frowning brows. He was a fairly well-to-do young fellow from Tina's own class; and he had been her constant admirer for the past year or more. He wanted the girl to marry him but Tina had held him off and neither Thibeau nor Madame had interfered. "Tina was young yet and she was very pretty—she might do better," they said between themselves. To-night they watched her fondly and smiled to see her so gay, and such a belle. Madame had whispered to Thibeau Sid's compliment and they were prouder than before of the girl, for they, too, could see that Sid and Will were of a different world from theirs.

The scowling young man watched Tina whirling about in Will's arms. As soon as the music came to an end he made his way to her. "Tina," he entreated, going close to her side, "I want you for the next dance."

"So does someone else—and I've promised him already."

"Well, then, the next one," persisted her lover.

"Oh, we'll see! You ain't such a good dancer as you might be, Gene."

Here Sid, coming up, claimed Tina for the promised dance, and she went away with him, arm in arm, without a look at Gene, who stood gazing after her in helpless anger and chagrin.

Tina had been chatty enough with Will, but she walked away with Sid in silence, her head up, her red mouth curved disdainfully. Sid watched her, his admiration growing and kindling.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "What are you 'huffy' about? You could talk fast enough when my friend was your partner."

"Oh! I didn't know as you cared about talking with *brunettes!*"

Sid laughed. It pleased his vanity that the girl had been piqued by his supposed preference for something different from herself.

"That was only a joke," he said, and added, as the music began again and he put his arm about Tina: "Anyway, if I *have* preferred blondes, I shan't any more, now that I've seen you."

The red rose higher in Tina's cheeks and her eyes glowed with a deeper fire as she and Sid swung into the dance. This new conquest elated her, the more — that she herself was pleased with Sid. His bold glances of admiration and gross flattery, which he would not dare bestow upon Emily or any girl of careful bringing up, were intoxicating to Tina. She accepted them without qualification or doubt as to their entire genuineness.

When the dance was nearing an end Sid whispered to her the wish that they might find a little table in a corner of the shrub-enclosed garden devoted to refreshment-serving, where they might have something to eat and drink and a chance to talk and become better acquainted.

Tina assented without attempting to conceal her pleasure, and arm in arm with Sid she passed poor, honest Gene, leaning disconsolate against the wall, without a look, as she and Sid went on and out to the garden. As they entered a couple rose from a table at the far end, somewhat out of the brightest light of the flaring kerosene lamps that hung in brackets upon several posts within the enclosure, and they at once made their way to it.

"We're in luck," said Sid. "This isn't half bad." He

sank into the nearest chair, leaving Tina to help herself to the remaining one. Sid never wasted any energy in politeness unless he was with people whom he knew understood its requirements.

One of Madame Thibeu's assistants had just relieved her tray of several glasses of beer and a plate of pretzels at a table round which a party was gathered, not far from where Tina and Sid had seated themselves.

"I say, young woman, this way, will you?" Sid called to her with an authoritative manner which pleased Tina mightily. It sustained her in her opinion of his superiority to the other men present — excepting, of course, his friend Will.

The young woman addressed inwardly resented his insolent summons. With the crowd present she had felt herself on terms of equality. Another time she might be there dancing with them. If now she was serving them, they asked civilly for what they wanted and received it from her with familiar jests and good-natured equality. Nevertheless, she went to Sid, who was impatiently waiting for her, lounging in his chair, one arm thrown over the back of it, the other spread out upon the table, his whole bearing expressing the "free and easy" attitude he had taken toward his companion and her surroundings.

"Bring me a bottle of champagne — a quart of your best," he ordered, in a tone carefully regulated to convey the idea that champagne was a no more unusual thing with him than so much water, yet also being careful to speak so that every one in their vicinity might hear him. The young woman "help" opened her mouth in wonder. Her resentment melted. Anyone who could order champagne as if it were such an everyday occurrence, must be privileged to call her in any tone he pleased. Madame Thibeu, coming in her turn with a tray of beer glasses, also heard the order. She set its contents quickly before her customers and bustled forward.

"Champagne? Oh, yes! And is it my Tina who is to drink champagne with you? My, she is the proud girl!"

This to Sid, her face beaming with pleasure. Then to the "help." "Close your mouth, Libby, and go quick. Tell Thibeu the young gentleman's order, champagne. A pint? No? A *quart*? The *best*? Yes? Run, Libby; tell Thibeu to get it ready. You will have something to eat also?"

"I'm hungry as a wolf," said Sid, and Tina ought to be — she's danced enough! What have you got? Any birds?"

"If I had known! It is too bad! No, there are no birds. The nearest would be chicken sandwiches," anxiously. "They will perhaps do?"

"Oh, they'll do. They're better than nothing," said Sid, loftily, always making sure that he was loud enough to impress the humble beer drinkers about him.

Madame hurried away, elated. *Champagne! Birds!* What a customer! He must be rich — richer than she thought. He had never ordered *champagne* before; *this* was for Tina. He was certainly taken with her. Well, why not? She was very pretty. There were not many girls like Tina. It was to be hoped that Thibeu would have a bottle of champagne.

Tina learned over the table toward Sid, her black eyes flashing with admiration. "You're a real swell, ain't you?"

"What makes you think that?" asked Sid, feeling especially pleased with himself.

"Oh, I can tell. I knew in a minute you and your friend were upper crust. You've got a different cut from the rest of the folks here."

Just then Gene wandered into the enclosure, looking about until his eyes found what he sought. Tina met his beseeching look with one glance of disdain, and then, ignoring him, bent upon Sid her undivided attentions. Poor, rough, common, honest, loving Gene! He stumbled into the nearest seat and furtively watched the two laughing and talking together.

"Do you live around here?" Tina was asking Sid.

"No," he answered. "My friend and I came on our bicycles."

"Where from?" persisted Tina.

"From Belvers." Sid lied with cheerful alacrity.

"I guess you haven't been coming here long, or I'd have seen you before."

"That's what I want to know," said Sid, quickly, glad to get away from questions about himself. "I've been coming here over two months. Why the deuce haven't *you* been around?"

"I didn't know there was such good company at home, and I was having a great time at Jen's. She lives over to Millwell, you know. She's got three sisters working in the mills there. Jen's going to begin this fall."

"That's tough," said Sid. "You're luckier. You don't have to do that sort of thing."

"Oh, I don't know," said Tina, with a wilful pout. "I've been teasing to go down there again when Jen goes back, and get a place myself in one of the mills."

"Pshaw! What do you want to do that for?" Sid threw a world of disappointment into his question.

"The girls have lots of fun down there. This place is getting awful poky. No fellows worth having live round here. I've either got to go without a beau—or take up with someone that ain't the sort I want. There's a good many nice sort of fellows in Millwell."

"Nicer than me?"

"Oh, come! Your guyin'! You know they ain't in it with *you*."

Sid bent toward her and whispered swiftly. He saw Madame and Libby coming with the champagne and sandwiches. "Then what do you want to go back to Millwell for? I'll manage to get around pretty often—if *you're* here."

Madame and Libby were at hand. The wine was opened amid much senseless laughter and chattery talk—of Sid's expressions of satisfaction at the arrival of the refreshments; of Madame's apologies; of hopes that the wine

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was good enough to suit the young gentleman; of banter about the fancy which Tina and Sid had seemed to take to each other; of flippant remarks from Tina, at which her mother laughed, thinking them very smart, and which put Sid more and more at ease with her.

From his solitary table Gene still watched them from under drawn brows that grew blacker as Tina and Sid, being again left alone, grew more absorbed and confidential over their wine. He seized Libby by the hand as she passed him on her way out. "I want a drink, Libby," he said hoarsely—"whiskey. Bring it quick, won't you?"

Meanwhile Sid and Tina were fast arriving at a very familiar stage of acquaintance.

They talked long in subdued voices; Sid quite oblivious of any one but Tina; she with a studied appearance of absorption in Sid, but in reality letting no move nor look of Gene's escape her. The wine was having its effect on Sid, but as for Tina, whether it was because almost from infancy the fumes of beer and liquor had been taken in as the very breath of her nostrils, or what, no liquor from beer to champagne could ever quite make her lose her head.

She had finally promised Sid, after adroitly compelling him to use much persuasion, that she would think no more about going back to Millwell—at least for the present. At this promise Sid reached under the table and gave her hand a surreptitious squeeze.

The movement did not escape Gene's jealous eyes. He jumped up excitedly and with an air of sudden determination made his way to them.

"It's for you to dance with me again, Tiny," he said. "You've spent time enough with this fellow."

"Fellow! how dare you speak of me like that? What do you come here and interrupt us for anyway! Don't you know any better?"

"She was dancing with me when you came, and she'd be dancing with me now if you hadn't come fooling around

her!—yes!—and she's coming with me now! You don't get another chance to squeeze my girl's hand!"

"Oh, stop your noise, Gene! Who said I was your girl? You make me tired. Go dance with someone else—there's plenty'll be glad to get you—I'm better engaged!"

"Yes, get out of here," blustered Sid. "If you don't I'll put you out!" The champagne had risen high. Sid had lost his sense of proportion—and discretion.

The brawny Gene laughed. "You'll put me out? Tiny, do you want to see your pretty little whipper-snapper put me out? Come on! Put me out! Why don't you put me out?"

The fracas was drawing a crowd. Tina emitted a number of little shrill screams. Not that she was afraid, but she wanted to keep her place in the rumpus. It was exciting. Two men going to fight over her! It would be all over the place—she must be getting very attractive! Her mother had told her some day she would have plenty of young men dying to get her. It was all coming true! It was more intoxicating than the wine.

The uproar brought Thibeau and Madame. They interposed themselves between the two men. Thibeau apologized to Sid. "Such a good customer!" "Such a good gentleman! to be so annoyed and insulted in his place! But the man was crazy over Tina." "If it could be overlooked?" "It should not happen again if he could help it, but these girls! well, a father must expect trouble when he had such a pretty daughter," and laughing, he pinched Tina's cheek and went away.

Madame, with persuasive hand on Gene's shoulder hustled him away. "That was no way for him to do." "Did he not know that Tina was wilful?—that she could not be driven?" "He must bide his time—he must not worry the child—he must be patient—everything would be sure to come out right!" "Ah! here was a nice girl; and she had no partner; she would dance with Gene?" "Why of course!" and before Gene quite knew what was

happening he found himself dancing with a young woman — not Tina.

Sid, a bit shaken and excited, had sat down again and was hastily finishing what little was left of the bottle of wine.

"That fellow's a nuisance!"

"He's just bluffing!" said Tina. "He won't bother us. He'll be afraid Pa won't let him speak to me any more if he cuts up rough again."

It must be said that Sid felt considerably reassured. He proposed another dance and Tina was eager to be once more upon the floor to be pointed out and commented upon as the heroine of a jealous encounter. On their way into the dance hall they met Will and "Jen" coming out.

"Hello! thought you'd lost yourselves, till we heard about the row," was "Jen's" greeting.

"Excuse us a minute; I want to speak to my friend."

Will took Sid to one side. "You're a chump!" was his first remark. "Didn't you know better than stand up against that coal heaver? We'd better get home P. D. Q., or you may have a couple of black eyes or a smashed-in coco to account for. It's getting late anyhow."

Gene seeing Tina and "Jen" together, suddenly left his partner standing amazed in the middle of the floor and strode over to the girls.

"Tina, are you going to marry me, or ain't you?" he demanded. "I want to know right now."

"Oh, I don't know," drawled Tina, indifferently. "I might do better."

"You might do worse," he answered savagely, and flung out of the room and away from the place.

"My! but he's the business end of a wasp though! I wouldn't like to fool with *him*!" said "Jen."

"Oh, his bark's worse than his bite; I guess I can manage him all right." Tina answered with the easy cruelty of one who knew her power.

Here Sid and Will came up to the young women to say that notwithstanding the hard work it was to tear them-

selves away, they were obliged to do so. Important matters, *business* matters that required their attention next day really demanded that they get a little sleep before morning. But when could they see them again?

A meeting in the very near future was arranged for and effusive leave-takings were indulged in.

"Well—we must be off," said Sid at last. "Good night, Tina."

"Good night . . ." Tina laughed. "Say, you ain't told me your name. What is it?"

The question came unexpectedly. Sid hesitated.

"You ain't forgot it, have you?" "Jen" and Tina both laughed.

"I haven't had so much wine as that!" Sid laughed too. "My name's—Ned."

"Ned *what?*" Tina was insistent when she once got started. "You've got another one, hain't you?"

"Of course! It's—Cutler," said Sid.

"Ned Cutler. There's nothing the matter with that—you needn't have been so 'fraid about telling it. Good night, Ned." "Good night, Will." "Good night, 'Jen.'" "Good night, Tina." "Don't forget, Thursday night." "You can depend on us—we'll be here sure."

They got away at last—driving their bicycles at top speed so they might reach home before the dawn should break. Faster they sped through the cool, dew-wet fragrance of the near coming morning, farther and farther from the familiar companionship of the girls, from the fumes of beer growing stale, the flaring lamps beginning to flicker and smoke and send forth their gassy vapors upon the already noxious air.

"It was a rattling good time, wasn't it?"

"Great! but those girls are green as grass or they'd have known Ned Cutler wasn't your right name. It came out like pulling a tooth."

"Did 'Jen' ask yours?"

"'Course! First thing with *her*."

"What did you tell her?"

"Will Harris — quick."

"What did you give up your own first name for?"

"Had to! — she'd seen W. H. on my handkerchief."

"That's where *you're* green."

Sid's tone expressed cunning mixed with self-satisfaction. "I've never had anything but a laundry mark on anything belonging to *me* since my first quarter at college."

No more was said. Swiftly, silently they stole along. At Sid's gate they stopped in the shadow. "Hope you get in all right," whispered Will.

Sid only nodded in reply. This was always the most dangerous moment for him. He started toward the house, moving stealthily. His nerves were at a tension. Not until he was safe in his room would he breathe freely again.

Will remained, watching for some time after Sid had disappeared from sight. No signs of life appeared about the house.

"Guess *he's* all right," said Will. "It's up to *me* now."

Something, she knew not what, suddenly roused Mrs. Ben from her belated sleep. Getting up quickly she lit a match and looked at the clock. It was just twenty minutes past three. She looked at Sid's window. All was dark. "He must a ben too tired 'n' wore out to set up studyin' to-night," she thought; "I'll let him sleep jest as long as he wants to in the mornin'."

Being unable to account for her sudden awakening she put it down to her unusual nervousness, and without further investigation went back to bed.

CHAPTER XI

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

FRESH, sweet, joyful, like an ever young mother lifting the veil from the face of her sleeping child, dawn drew the filmy cover of night up, up, 'till the earth glowed once again in the world-old miracle of the rising sun. The dew drops gave themselves up to his warmth; the birds chirped to him their gayest greeting, the flowers sent out to him the sweetest incense of their souls; every other expression of the ever-lasting mind responded to his life-giving mission with the natural harmony of being, all — except man.

As Ben and Daniel Tewksbury opened their eyes upon the beauty of the morning it was to them simply "sun-up," the call to a day of renewed strife. No thought of pleasure nor of praise at the safe delivery by the Universe of another day illumined their hearts, no thought penetrated their minds that if but one fraction of such discord as was raging in their lives, should enter into the divine harmony controlling that universe, creation would be blotted out; and no premonition flashed a warning across their benumbed consciousness that ruin was the end to which their cupidity and anger were inevitably driving them.

As Daniel Tewksbury went about his work this morning his face wore an expression of grim satisfaction. He was elated with the outcome of Ben's attempt to take possession of the lane. At the breakfast table he had even chuckled with delight as he imagined Ben's discomfiture.

"Guess Ben 'n' Mariar didn't expect no such reception! Guess they'll hold their breath fer awhile now," he said, as he saucered his coffee and drank it with unusual relish.

"I wisht," quavered Mrs. Cutler with timid wistfulness,

"that you two boys could settle peaceable about that lane."

"I'm ready to settle peaceable," replied Daniel. "All Ben's got to do is to own up he ain't got no claim onto it."

"Seems to me you might divide it 'tween you." This was an unusually bold venture for Mrs. Cutler, but she was encouraged to take it by Daniel's unwonted joviality.

"They ain't got any right to a foot of it! They've got a darn sight more'n I have but they're greedy fer them few feet that belongs to me. They shan't have *one* of 'em!"

Dan'l brought his fist down with an emphasis that rattled the dishes.

Mrs. Cutler desisted with a sigh—so often she had heard this, first from one brother, then from the other, and between times from Mrs. Ben.

"But I guess," said Daniel, as he rose and put on his old straw hat to go out into the field, "they won't try any more high-handed tricks. I give 'em a twister they wan't countin' on!"

Ned, watching his uncle's retreating figure, spoke for the first time. "I don't believe this is the end of it," he said.

"Oh, dear, I jest hate quarrelin'," Mrs. Cutler's voice quavered—she sat down helplessly. "It gets me all nervous 'n' upsot. Your Pa and me never quarreled—I ain't never had no peace ner quiet sence he was took from us."

Ned, standing in the doorway, watching his uncle's retreating figure, blurted out, "I believe he's the worst old pigheaded fellow in the country, except Uncle Ben, and he's a worse one!"

"Oh, Ned, ye mustn't talk like that," pleaded Mrs. Cutler, always pacific, but Priscilla, behind her mother's back, nodded a vigorous agreement with Ned.

"All right, mother, I won't say it again, I'll just *think* it; and maybe I can take you out of this some day—I'm going to try to, anyway." With this Ned swung out of the door and after his uncle into the fields.

"I'm afeerd Ned ain't goin' to stan' it 'round here much

longer — he'll be goin' away first chance he gits — I see that a-comin'."

"Now, Ma, don't worry about *that*. If Ned goes it will be to try and make himself independent — and us too."

"I know — I know; but we mustn't complain, Priscilla. We must try and make Ned think that everything's pleasant for us here. I'd rather put up with it than have Ned go away from us — somethin' might happen to him."

Poor, gentle soul! the rebuffs of life had left her timid, tremulous, weak at the thought of facing new trials. The old troubles, the everyday annoyances, she had become used to; but to have Ned go out of her daily life — into she knew not what!

"Well, he hasn't gone yet!" Priscilla was most practically reassuring. "Here!" she took her mother's sun-bonnet from a hook on the wall and put it on her head. "Go out in the garden," she said, "and work among the flowers. It always does you good. I don't need any help around the house this morning."

In the "big house" Mrs. Ben was first astir; she had refrained from waking her husband, which was an unusual thing, but they had passed an unusual night. Being exhausted, nerves and body, from the effect of the high excitement under which they had labored they had gone to bed at an earlier hour than common. The "Ice Cream Festival," which was to have enlivened the evening, had been postponed.

Mrs. Ben had promised to make and send the ice cream for the occasion, but had sent word to Miss Fitch, who speedily informed the other ladies interested, that she was "too nervous and upset to do a thing." Feeling that an ice cream festival without ice cream would be futile, notice was hastily tacked up in Tibbitt's Emporium that the affair had been put off.

But though Mr. and Mrs. Tewksbury had retired, it was not to the sleep they so much needed. They had been

restless, wakeful, moving about their room — until, as Sid had explained to Will, he thought they would never settle down so he could get out of the house.

In Ben's heavy sleep now, at an hour when he was ordinarily up and doing, he showed the exhaustion induced by the strain of his violent emotions.

His wife, dressing quietly, said to herself that she would let him sleep until breakfast was about ready — he needed rest if the plan they had decided upon was to be carried out. When she had put the finishing touches to her dress, had fastened the band of her print gown at the front of the neck with an old-fashioned brooch, tied on her big, well-starched, well-ironed gingham apron, and given the last stroke to smooth her already sleekly wavy hair, she tiptoed carefully to look out at Sid's window. The shade was still down.

"He's asleep, too. He wan't studyin' last night, but I 'xpect his head's most wore out porin' over his books the way he is most o' the time. I don't see why he couldn't graduate to collidge when he studies so hard; they couldn't a-give him fair play!" Unconsciously, she sighed. Scarcely to herself and never to another, not even to her husband, had she ever confessed her disappointment and mortification over Sid's failure to enter upon a medical career. She had expected him to come home covered with honors; in imagination she had seen his diploma, ornately framed, adorning her parlor wall, and on the main street of Litchfield (the "Corners" being much too small and unimportant for *Sid*), she had proudly seen displayed a big black sign with lettering in gold, "Sidney Tewksbury, M. D." Though all this dream had come to naught, she had never for a moment believed that it was through any fault or lack in *Sid*. In some way someone else must have been to blame. "Like as not," she said to herself, "the' was them 'at was jealous of him 'n' workin' agin him all the time."

However, the arrangement, which was almost completed, whereby Sid was to have a position in the bank had revived

her drooping pride. "He'll git up to be a banker," she whispered, as she stood gazing at Sid's shade-covered window, "'n' that's as good as bein' a doctor — mebbe better."

Then she slipped quietly out of the room to prepare the breakfast.

Ben, awakened only in time to dress before the meal was on the table, drank his first cup of coffee and emptied his first plate of eggs, ham, and "warmed up" potatoes in silence. Then he asked with a perceptible tone of annoyance, "Ain't Sid up yit?"

"I ain't called him; he's been studyin' so much at nights lately, I think he orte rest in the mornin'."

"What's the *use* o' his studyin', 'n' his collidge, anyway? What's he good fer?"

"How kin you ask such a question as that, Ben? Can't ye see how diff'rent Sid is from the rest of the young men 'round here? Jest look at the s'ciety he kin git into! Ain't he hand 'n' glove with Will Hubbard? — 'n' the Hubbards is one o' the most genteelest famblys in Litchfield. Ye don't s'pose neither 'at Mrs. Anson Peabody 'd be favorin' Sid for her Em'ly — if 'twan't fer his ways 'n' education, do ye?"

"That don't pay off the mor'gidge we hed to put on the place to git him his larnin' 'n' his uppish ways!" persisted Ben, doggedly. "Why," he went on, suddenly drawing out the sluice and letting his long pent-up feelings loose in a flood, "I've heerd of boys that got through collidge, *graduated*, too; 'n' earned ev'ry cent o' money themselves. Sid ain't never earned a dollar — no, ner a ten-cent piece — not even sence he got his larnin' — 'n' we mor'gidgin' the place to give it to 'im. If he wuz goin' to change his mind about bein' a doctor, why didn't he change it before we got the mor'gidge? I ain't said nothin' about it, but I've jest about come to the conclusion that Sid lacks somethin' o' bein' 'all wool, 'n' a yard wide.'"

Mrs. Ben had laid down her knife and fork and was staring at her husband in amazement. "Well, Ben Tewks-b'ry! I never heard ye go on like that before. I ain't hed

no idee that sech thoughts was runnin' in your mind. Now what's the good of our hev'in' anything if 'taint to help our own flesh 'n' blood with, I'd like t' know? From the way you talk you'd like to hev Sid doin' the way Ned Cutler's doin' 'n' not knowin' any mor'n he does, ner amountin' to enny mor'n he'll ever amount to, jest because his father could never make a penny for his fambly, on'y jest f'm hand to mouth."

Ben listened, but his dogged expression showed that he was still unconvinced. "What's been the use of our workin' 'n' savin'," he retorted quickly, "if what we've got hes to be squandered on Sid, whilst he's makin' fine friends an' dressin' up in his best clo'es every day. Why don't he turn to 'n' save a man's hire workin' on the farm —"

"We ain't never calc'lated to hev Sid do common labor — he ain't ben brought up t' do it," Mrs. Tewksbury interrupted her husband with an argument which she thought would be pacific—" 'n' fer *my* part, I ain't never *wanted* him to do it."

"You'd ruther he'd set up nights studyin' fer somethin' that never amounts to nothin' 'n' gittin' up with red eyes in the middle of the day, hed ye? How d'ye know he's studyin'? How d'ye know he ain't readin' story books?"

Mrs. Ben was dumbfounded at the rank growth of dissatisfaction with Sid that, all undreamed-of by her, had sprung up in her husband's mind. With all her mother love and faith in "her boy," she set herself to the task of uprooting these, to her, almost sacrilegious doubts.

"Don't ye s'pose I'd see the story books around his room if he was readin' them? Don't I see the collidge study books, every mornin', opened out on the table by the lamp, jest where he's left off studyin' of 'em? *I've* seen his eyes all red when he got up, but I ain't ben findin' fault in my mind about it. *I've* been *proud* o' him, 'n' jest afeerd he'd make himself sick a-porin' so stiddy over his learnin'. He must hev his head jest full o' knowledge we don't 'preciate, fer we ain't smart enough to onderstand it."

There was a shade less of doggedness in Ben's eyes,

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and a suspicion of wavering belief as to the correctness of his own views, which was not lost upon his wife. Taking advantage of it, she went on with increased confidence. "Why, ye ought to be ashamed o' yourself, Ben, goin' back on your only child; I don't know what to make o' ye. It's the actions o' that Dan'l Tewksb'ry yistiddy that's upsot ye; ye don't know what y're sayin'."

"I s'pose that's what's riled me up so's I spoke out, but it's been a simmerin' in my mind fer a good spell. O' course I don't know nothin' 'bout edjication outside deestrick school—" as usual Ben was being swayed by Mrs. Ben's more positive temperament—"mebbe I'm wrong about Sid."

Mrs. Tewksbury's spirit rose with her victory. She went on further to placate her husband and to effectually restore Sid to favor. "Course you're wrong, Ben, 'n' now it's all fixed fer Sid to go into the bank, I sh'd think ye'd feel perfectly sat'sfied about him. Don't ye s'pose folks must think he's smart to take him into the bank?"

"I s'pose so," Ben answered, with a lingering trace of dubiousness in his manner, "but I had to do consid'ble urgin'. Anson Peabody bein' fav'rble wuz what clinched it."

"That's jest it, 'n' Mrs. Peabody wantin' Sid 'n' Em'ly to take a likin' to one another, Mr. Peabody'll push Sid along to the bank. Ev'ry thing's turnin' out fer the best! Sid'll git to be a banker some day; he's so smart he's bound to git along when he's once started. Yes, it's all comin' out fer the best, 'n' there's more money in bein' a banker 'n' ther' is in doctorin'."

Ben stirred his coffee, poured out a brimming saucerful and drank it before replying, then he said: "Well, he'd orto make somethin'; his learnin's cost a good deal t' the square inch. O' course," he went on, after a moment, as if of reflection, "'tain't fixed *dead sure* 'bout his goin' into the bank." Mrs. Ben was painfully surprised. "*It ain't?* I thought 'twas all settled! What's henderin'?"

"We got to give bonds 'fore he gits the place."

"Bonds! What's them? What do we have to give *bonds* fer?"

"We got to give a sort o' mor'gidge on prop'ty, er git some one else that's got prop'ty, t' go bonds fer two thousand dollars to pay up the bank with if Sid don't come out square with the money he hez to handle."

"Ye mean if Sid ain't honer'ble?"

"If he ain't honest, er if he's lunk-headed enough t' make mistakes."

Mrs. Ben's indignation was rising. "I'd like to know what you said to them men fer insinuat' that Sid wa'nt smart enough t' git along without puttin' up two thousand dollars fer him!—'n' ez fer bein' *dishoner'ble*!—t' hint at *that* I call downright insultin'. That's what I'd a told 'em!"

Ben was not at all excited. He took his time about answering. "'Tain't because it's Sid. It's customary. They got a motter, 'ye can't trust nobody that's into a bank.' If the' ain't no bond, th' ain't no job fer Sid."

Mrs. Ben had cooled down sufficiently to consider the inevitable. "Well, you're willin' to stand fer him, ain't ye?"

"I ain't got nothin' to stand by with. They won't take the farm fer security; 'tain't free 'n' clear."

"Seems to me they're more pertick'ler than nice."

There was a silence charged with uneasiness; then, "What you goin' t' do 'bout it?"

"D'know ez I'm goin' to do anything. Don't see anything I *kin* do."

"Ain't the' nobody you kin git to give the bonds, ez you call 'em?"

"It's ticklish business goin' bond fer anyone. That was one of the fool things Cutler did—y'know how he got served. "Ain't many folks ez easy 'n' obligin' ez Cutler wuz, ner ez foolish. I don't know enny body 't'd do it."

At this point Mrs. Ben rose majestically. "So long as I got land free 'n' clear Sid ain't goin' to lose the sitiuation.

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There's the land 'at father left to me when he died — *that's* good enough fer any bond they want!"

Ben finished his last mouthful of ham and eggs and drained his last swallow of coffee. "If you're willin' to do *that* — but I d'know ez yer takin' enny resk."

"Resk! what! With my Sid?"

"Well, Mariar, mebbe he *is* ez smart ez you think he is, 'n' if you're willin' to chance it, I won't try to hender ye, 'n' I hope he'll fill the bill. Anyway," Ben's tone expressed more satisfaction than at any previous point in the controversy, "it'll git him out o' bed in the mornin'; that'll be wuth somethin'. Git me my new alpacy co't," he continued as he took his hat from the little wall rack behind the door. "I'll go right down to the Corners 'n' see Withersp'n 'bout gettin' out the bond papers."

"Goin' to say anything to him 'bout takin' the law o' Dan'l Tewksb'ry?"

"Mebbe. I d'know yit."

She had followed him to the door. They stepped out upon the old-fashioned brick walk leading to the front gate and stood looking across the fields at the lilac trees, swaying in the breeze up and down the lines of the disputed territory.

"If I was you I wouldn't pay too much attention to anythin' Jestice Withersp'n'll say 'bout the lane. He's allus fer *dividin'* it! Seems to me he sort o' favors Dan'l's side, er he wouldn't have interfered with ye yistiddy."

"I'll hear what he hes to say, but if he talks *dividin'*, or compermisin', I go some where's else fer advice." This was an attitude that met with Mrs. Ben's entire approval, and with much inward satisfaction, she dwelt upon the prospect of the legal battle in which Ben was about to hurl the first bomb.

She watched him drive away toward the Corners on his visit of twofold purpose to Judge Witherspoon.

CHAPTER XII

FIRST MOVES IN LAW

As Ben Tewksbury drove into the Corners behind his team of steady-going bays, shopkeepers, clerks and customers in the various places of business hastily found their way to the door, and pedestrians nudged their companions and craned their necks to gaze after him with undisguised curiosity.

He drew rein in front of Justice Witherspoon's office and, with a deliberation befitting this crisis in his affairs, he alighted and hitched his team to the post in front of the Justice's door. Like an electric spark the thought was flashed to the brain behind each pair of watching eyes.

"He's goin' to take the law of Dan'l," and lips began to whisper the words from one to another, "Ben Tewksbury's goin' to law it with Dan'l!"

The door of the Judge's office stood open, and he, within it, sat tilted comfortably back against the wall in a big wooden armchair reading a paper profusely decorated with pictures of horses mounted by jockeys, urging them to what was evidently a racing finish, and gentlemen with more or less pugnacious expressions and hands sheathed in dropsical-looking gloves facing each other belligerently, or administering knockout blows on the jaw or in the solar plexis. From his pleasant absorption in this lavish presentation of Columbia Corner's forbidden fruits the Judge was roused by the stopping of Ben's team before his open door.

"Ben Tewksb'ry!" ejaculated the Justice, watching Ben as he tied his horses—"lookin' for more trouble, I bet my hat." He plunged his face into his newspaper, seemingly oblivious to Ben's entrance.

Ben walked over to the stove, rusty red from the blazing fires of many winters, desolate now in its summer-uselessness, and standing there in thought, absently spread his hands before it as if to warm them.

"Mornin'," said the Judge, after a moment had passed with no word from Ben.

"Mornin', Jedge." Ben volunteered nothing further.

The Judge looked at him over the top of his paper. "Feel chilly?"

"Eh? Oh!" Ben dropped his hands; "didn't think what I was doin'."

"What's the matter? Mind overloaded?"

"Yes," replied Ben, "'n' I guess I better *unload* 'n' be done with it. Fust off, the's suthin' about Sid."

"Sid!" the Judge's eyes swept Ben's face with a curious glance. He had his own theories concerning Sid, which he had never felt it necessary to impart to any one. He wondered now if Ben. . . .

"Yes," Ben went on, "Anson Peabody's got him a situation in the bank."

"Oh!" Relieved, the Judge folded his paper methodically and laid it on his desk, turning to Ben with his usual calm and easy good-nature: "What you got such a long face for? Strikes *me* that's a pretty cheerful outlook — for Sid."

"That's whut Mariar thinks, but ye see the's a snag in the way."

"Oh! I s'pose it's the *snag* you've come to see *me* about."

"Well — sort o'. Sid's got to hev some one go bond fer 'im."

The Judge nodded. "Of course, that's gene'llly expected where a man has the handlin' of other people's money."

"I onderstand," Ben continued, "thet I ain't no good to go bond, cause my prop'ty's got a mor'gidge onto it. I d'know 's the's anybody out o' the fambly 'ud be willin' to do it."

The Judge drummed a tattoo on his desk, looking off through the window to the big trees opposite, their leaves

flirting with the morning sunshine. . . . Was Ben going to ask him to go on Sid's bond?

"Going on *any* body's bond is devilish resky business."

"That's what I told Mariar." There was a pause, then Ben resumed. If he had had any hope that Judge Witherspoon might offer to go bond for Sid it had by this time vanished. "His Ma's dead sot on his gittin' into the bank," he said. "She's willin' to go on his bond. Ye know that fifty odd acres her father left to her in his will? That's free 'n' clear. . . . I s'pose that 'ud be all right?"

"First class," answered the Judge, looking at Ben with as much solemnity as his personality permitted. "If Mis' Tewksb'ry's willin' to put up thet land, the directors oughtn't to want any better security."

"Whut you think 'bout her doin' it, Judge?"

The Justice shifted uneasily on his chair. Then he faced Ben with his jovial laugh. "See here, Tewksb'ry! havin' escaped matrimony myself, it ain't fair to ask me to tax my brain thinkin' what's best to do 'bout somebody else's children. You're takin' away the prime blessin' of bein' an old bach when you do that. No, sir! you and your wife have got to decide for yourselves what odds you're willin' to put up on Sid."

"O' course, it's on'y a form, anyway."

"Oh, of course, only a form —"

"Ez Mis' Tewksb'ry says, Sid comes from honest stock, 'n' he must hev learnin' enough not to git tangled up in his accounts — after all the money thet's be'n spent on 'im to collidge."

"Them's good arguments on your side, Ben —"

"'N' Mariar won't be sat'sfied anyway less she does it 'n' gits the job for the boy, so you go ahead, Jedge, will ye? You kin see Peabody 'n' whoever else there is to see, 'n' git the papers fixed up fer my wife to sign."

Ben moved as if to go — inwardly the Judge wondered if he was to make no mention of yesterday's trouble in the

lane. "I'll attend to it right away," he answered Ben. "I guess Mis' Tewksb'ry can come in in a couple o' days. I'll let you know."

Ben lingered, twirling his big straw hat round and round slowly. "Guess it's coming after all," thought the Justice.

"Dan'l cut up rough yistiddy; wan't no rhyme ner reason in 'im! I own I got wusted — d' know 's I would if you hedn't put in your oar. Seems to me 'n' to Mariar, too, Jedge, that you was sort o' helpin' Dan'l."

"I wan't helpin' one mor'n the other. You can't see nothin' straight 'bout that fool lane! You're cross-eyed ez El Tibbitts! I've listened to you boys talkin' pretty rash 'bout one another fer consid'ble many years, 'n' I ain't felt called upon to say much; but when you take to emphasizin' your ree-marks with axes aimed at one 'nother's heads! . . . well—it's time fer the majesty o' the law to git a hustle on without stoppin' to inquire whose corns is bein' trampled."

"Well, I'm goin' to put an end to any more trouble 'bout the lane — I'm goin' to settle it!"

"I'm glad o' that — made up your mind to compromise it?"

"Not by a long sight! I'm goin' to take it into court. I'm goin' to *law* it to git my rights."

The Judge brought his backward-tilted chair down upon its front legs with a bang. "When I saw ye hitchin' up in front o' my door somethin' about the set o' your back made me say to myself, 'I'll bet he's lookin' for more trouble.' By cricky! I hit the nail plumb on the head."

"I don't quite git yer meanin', Jedge."

"My meanin's plain as a pike staff. All the trouble you've had over that lane ye could put in a peanut shell compared to what ye'll hev if ye once start it runnin' in the courts. Take my advice, I'm givin' it to ye free of charge — go home — take a good dose of calomel — go to bed and sweat off yer darned obstinacy."

"Jedge, if any one but you talked to me like that I'd

git hoppin' *mad*; but it's on'y your way — I take that into consideration. I wuz goin' to ask ye t' argy my side o' the case, but if ye feel *that* way —"

"Wouldn't take the case if ye asked me fifty times! See here, Ben, *have sense*; let me go to Dan'l with a proposition to put your dividing line through the middle of the darn lane, fencin' round a little plot where Cutler's buried. I'll do that fer nothin' — you'll find it cheaper 'n' easier than fightin' it out in court."

"Ye want me to knuckle to Dan'l? Not if I live to be a hunderd!"

"Well, then, if I can bring Dan'l to offer the compromise to you, will ye agree to it?"

Ben eyed the Justice, suspicion in every line of his face. "Kinda achin' fer me t' give up, ain't ye? Kind-a seems to me arter all 't you're speakin' up pretty well fer *Dan'l*."

The Judge jumped to his feet in wrath. "You take your old lane 'n' go to Jericho with it! Go to court or any other damned place you want to — I wash my hands o' the hull business! I've got to get busy fixin' up that bond — good mornin'."

Ben, although accustomed to the Judge's outbursts, was somewhat taken aback by the vehemence of this answer to his implied doubts and by the curtness of his dismissal. He had no desire to be on bad terms with Justice Wither-spoon — at the same time the suspicion which had entered his mind that for some reason he was on Dan'l's side took deeper root. He inwardly congratulated himself that he had been "sharp" enough to discover it . . . lucky he hadn't been caught by the Judge's talk into giving up his purpose to take the law of Dan'l. He didn't know as he blamed the Judge for getting "riled" when he saw that he, Ben, had found out what he was driving at . . . still, he didn't want any hard feelings with the Judge . . . didn't want any open break, anyway . . .

"Pshaw! — didn't mean no offense, Jedge."

"So long's you've apologized we'll let it go at that."

Ben still lingered. He spoke next with a little hesitancy.

"'Bout that there mor'gidge, Jestice; crops 'a' ben good, but prices hev been squeezed down on us till the' ain't much profit. We ain't ree'lized ez much ez we 'orto — 'n' Sid not earnin' anything ez yit — I s'pose if I want to git a little more time it'll be all right with *you?*"

The Judge looked up good-naturedly. His anger, righteous though he had felt it to be, was not "nursed to keep it warm."

"Of course I'd just as soon renew it if it'll accommodate ye," he added, with his genial smile; "if ye have money enough left after goin' through the courts to keep up the int'rest."

Ben smiled too. With him, court was already charged on the side of profit. "Guess we kin scrape enough together to pay *that*." He turned as he was about to go out. "Much obliged to ye, Judge."

The Justice watched him as he unhitched his team and climbed into his wagon. "If pigheadedness was wuth fifty cents a pound Ben Tewksb'ry'd hev money to burn." Suddenly he jumped up. "By cricky! I wonder" . . . he went to the door, watching Ben as he drove down the street a short distance, crossed to the opposite side, and stopped. "He is! by Santy Claus and his eight reindeer, he's goin' to Tuffts! I'll be blowed! Well, it ain't any o' *my* business! Guess I'll go 'n' hev a talk with Peabody about that bond." He picked up his hat and clapping it on the back of his head went to see Anson Peabody at the bank, leaving his door standing wide open; which, although there was not much in the office besides some law books, a few wooden chairs, the before-mentioned rusty stove and a mammoth cuspidor, was still a tribute to the good character of Columbia Corners.

"Lawyer Tuffts" was the Judge's sole professional rival in the Corners. With such legal business as came to him, supplemented by percentages derived from representing various fire and life insurance companies and from occasional transactions in the capacity of real estate agent, Mr. Tuffts managed to make a very respectable living and

his family was numbered among those of social importance in the Corners. He was a man of about fifty years of age, tall, large-boned and rather spare, slightly rounded at the shoulders. The character of his face was in keeping with his body: long, rather narrow, a high sloping brow, with hair combed smoothly back over the head and allowed to fall a little low on the nape of the neck.

Much talking was going on between Tuffts and two or three men congregated in his office when Ben entered, at sight of whom a sudden paralysis of speech fell upon all of them. They had been, in fact, discussing the Tewksbury "boys" and the quarrel of the day before.

Mr. Tuffts was the first to recover himself. "Good morning—ah; come right in, Mr. Tewksbury — no one here but neighbors—ah."

The others having by this time recovered their grip on their vocabulary contributed their respective "mornin's" and "how be ye's." Ben acknowledged the salutations and accepted Mr. Tuffts' proffer of a chair. Then followed desultory remarks concerning the weather, crops, and other matters of common interest. The gaps between speeches became longer; Ben finally arose. "I'll drop in agin later on when ye ain't so busy." Mr. Tuffts showed an access of interest. "Want to see me about anything particular—ah?"

"Well — sort of."

At this the "neighbors" feeling themselves in the way shifted about awkwardly for an instant; then one clearing his throat volunteered that it was "gittin' on to twelve o'clock and he'd best be makin' tracks for home if he expected his wife to give him any dinner," and the others, seizing the opportunity, "guessed they'd go along with 'im fur's the blacksmith shop." So Ben was left alone with the lawyer, while the men departed to scatter further speculation broadcast as to what the Tewksb'ry "boys" were going to do *now*.

"I'm all attention—ah — go on, Mr. Tewksbury—ah."

"I kem in," said Ben resuming his seat, "t'hev a talk with

ye consarnin' the diff'rence twixt me 'n' Dan'l Tewksb'ry 'bout that lane."

"You mean just a friendly talk-ah? or do I understand you're looking for advice in lawr-ah."

"Guess mebbe a little o' both. I jest want to find out now if I kin *git* advice 'n' what kind of advice you'd say 'twas *best* fer me to take, 'n' how much it'll cost 'f I make up my mind *to* take it."

"Um — yes — I see-ah."

"Fust off — you got any preJUdeece to'ards Dan'l as agin me?"

"In that respect my mind is entirely opern-ah."

"Course you know 'bout my trouble with Dan'l fer years back — he bein' so obst'nate 'bout the prop'ty 'n' all."

"Well — yes — I should say I've heard something about it-ah."

"Heard 'bout yistiddy?"

Lawyer Tuffts pursed his lips and nodded his head gravely, "Dan'l cut up pretty rough-ah?"

"What you think 'bout my takin' the *law* of 'im to git my rights?"

"The majesty of the lawr-ah is the ark-ah and the refuge-ah of every one who has wrongs to be righted-ah!"

Ben seemed to be cheered and exhilarated by this peroration.

"Then you advise me fer to take my case into court?"

Mr. Tuffts jabbed with his pencil at a piece of paper on his desk. "*So far* — Mr. Tewksb'ry — I've just been talking-ah. When it comes to giving advice-ah — I must reserve that for my clients-ah."

"Well — S'posin' I hire you to argy the case, think ye kin beat out fer me? Ye think I've got a strong case, don't ye?"

Mr. Tuffts hesitated for a second. "I ain't up on all the points-ah; haven't seen any of the documents, the will and so forth, but-ah," here Mr. Tuffts warmed up with encouraging enthusiasm, "from all that I've heard I think you've got a chance to win-ah."

Mr. Tuffts saw that Ben was mightily pleased.

"Well *now* — what d'ye charge f'm start to finish fer goin' in 'n' lickin' Dan'l?"

Lawyer Tuffts answered with careful deliberation. "I can't say exactly—ah. I don't know how much time nor how much work will be necessary to accomplish the lickin'—ah, but I'll be as reasonable as anybody else—ah. You can give me a retaining fee of — well say ten dollars — and I'll start proceedings at once—ah."

"You lawyers is kind of expensive, ain't ye? Didn't s'pose I'd hev to pay anything fore you'd started in to *do* somethin'! that's like payin' a doctor 'fore he'd give ye any medicine."

"Time's money with lawyers—ah," Mr. Tuffts answered. "You needn't be afraid but what you'll get all the medicine you want after you once start in—ah."

"Well, I'll sleep on it and let you know in the mornin'," said Ben, rising and going to the door. "You sleep on it too, and make up your mind to split that ten. Mebbe I'd come to the figure five." He went out, pleased with his own shrewdness.

Ben unhitched and cared for his horses and, still pondering over the plunge he was about to make upon the unknown sea of litigation, he walked round the house and up the steps to the front porch, intending to sit down in his big rocker and come to a conclusion in regard to Tuffts in the matter of the ten dollars — in case Tuffts refused to come down. He found the chair occupied by Sid, who reclined at ease and made no movement toward vacating it in his father's favor. He had been smoking a cigarette, but when his father's returning team came in sight along the highway, he had hastily puffed it to the end and thrown the tip far out into some tall grass beyond the porch.

"Oh! — didn't know I'd find you out o' bed yit. Got another case of pink eyes agin this mornin', ain't ye?" Ben said, looking at Sid with disapproval.

"My eyes aren't very strong — there're bound to look that way sometimes," Sid answered. It was his desire to "keep on the right side" of his father, but he inwardly anathematized him for observing what he had hoped repeated ablutions of cold water had rendered unnoticeable.

Ben went on in a tone of growing authority. "I guess it's time this night studyin' is put an end to. I ain't put my foot down afore but I put it down now! Whatever you got to learn that ye didn't learn at collidge, ye'll git up in the mornin' 'n' larn! I don't want to see a light burnin' in your room after nine o'clock!"

"Fer goodness sake, Ben, what ye hectorin' the boy about *now?*" Mrs. Ben had appeared in the doorway unnoticed by Ben but in time to overhear the latter part of his dictum to Sid. "It's a wonder to me the boy tries to learn *any-thing* with you always opposin' him. It's jest as much *my* home as 'tis yourn; and he's jest as much *my* boy ez he is yourn, and *I* say, if he wants to study nights he orto be let do it."

"Oh," said Sid, "if father really objects to my studying I can cut it out I suppose." Sid managed to convey by his tone a deep regard for parental authority mingled with a distinct impression that in obedience to that authority he was renouncing his fondest hopes. Mentally he calculated that if he went into the bank he would be obliged to forego the luxury of long morning naps anyway; that putting out his light at nine o'clock need not interfere with his getting out of the house whenever he pleased — and he would have the benefit of seeming deference to his father's wishes.

Mrs. Ben, ignorant of the under-thought, hearing only the tone of plaintive resignation, burst forth indignantly.

"It's a wonder, Ben Tewksb'ry, that you've left a spark of ambition in the child! I declare — if it wan't fer *me* he'd be nothin' but a common farm hand like Ned Cutler — 'stid o' bein' fit to be took into a bank — now *I* say he ought to be let to study whenever it pleases him best."

"Oh, well — hev it your own way — hev it your own way — let him study when he likes — ye always hev spiled him 'n' I s'pose ye always will. Ain't dinner most ready?"

"That's what I came out to tell you — but you upshot me so I forgot all about *dinner*. It's on the table 'n' gettin' cold."

The dinner, an excellent one notwithstanding the slight cooling it had received while Mrs. Ben was making the usual short work of her husband's parental authority, was partly consumed in silence. Then Ben, the keen edge of his hunger removed, began to vouchsafe the information that both Mrs. Tewksbury and Sid were waiting anxiously for — although diplomacy, based on many years' experience in the best way to "manage" Ben, had kept them from asking any questions.

"I been talkin' to Tuffts," he said.

"Thought you was goin' to talk to Justice Withersp'n."

"Hevn't said I didn't, hev I? I seen the Jestice fust."

"Then I sh'd thought you'd a *said* so fust."

"Mother! Why don't you let father tell things his own way?" Wiley Sid! he felt the necessity of strengthening himself in his father's good graces.

"The Jestice wouldn't have nothin' to do with the case — wanted me to whack up with Dan'l 'n' divide the lane —"

"He's always talkin' that way — 'tain't no use listenin' to him!" said Mrs. Ben with roused spirit.

"Besides," said Sid, "I think he favors the other side."

"That's the second sens'ble thing you've said — I guess you got some o' your father's smartness after all" — Sid's stock was plainly rising. "I didn't make no bones o' tellin' Withersp'n that *that's* jest what I been thinkin'."

"What did he say?" asked Mrs. Ben, with keen interest.

"Tried to smooth it over o' course, but he didn't fool *me*! Then I went over and seen Tuffts."

"Tuffts is a duffer!" said Sid.

"Think so?" said Ben, with a certain deference to Sid's opinion that he had not shown for some time. "Well — I d'know — he says I got a good case — but he wants ten dol-

lars to bind the bargain — retain him, he called it, before he does a lick o' lawin' over it."

"Ten dollars!" exclaimed Sid.

"Pretty steep, ain't it? I offered to split the difference with 'im —"

"*Steep?* why nobody *but* a duffer would take a case for *that!* You haven't had much dealing with lawyers or you'd know a first class one would *laugh* at *ten* dollars."

"He *would*, would he? I want to tell you that ten dollars may be a laughin' matter to git, but it ain't no laughin' matter to pay out when you've sweated to *earn* it. 'Bout how much would a fust class lawyer take *without* laughin' at ye?"

"Oh — I don't know — twenty-five dollars — fifty dollars."

"I wouldn't pay it!"

"You might better pay it than lose your case."

"Sid's right! Didn't you say a minute ago that he had sense? If we're goin' to law we want fust class law."

"I guess Tuffts'll come down to five — an' I guess he's smarter 'n' you think he is. I ain't keen on throwin' out money as if 'twas floor sweepin's."

"Of course," Sid's tone was patiently indulgent, "you can *try* Tuffts if you want to — he can't do any worse than lose."

"Tuffts knows me — mebbe he'll take more int'rest than some strange feller."

"He knows Dan'l Tewksb'ry, too," Sid put in quickly.

"How do you know he mightn't sell you to the other side?"

Ben wavered — "I never thought o' *that!*"

"Now, see here, Ben," said Mrs. Tewksbury, taking the reins in her own hands as she had always done when the time came for action; "if we're goin' to law we're goin' to do things up in style — we don't want no ornery lawyer like Tuffts that knows Dan'l 'n' the Cutlerses, 'n' 'll be tellin' his wife all about what we're doin' and she'll tell everybody else in the Corners!"

"Who'll we git then? I don't know nobody else."

"You hitch up the team 'n' jest as soon's I'm through with the dishes you 'n' me 'n' Sid'll drive over to Litchfield. There's lots o' lawyers there 'n' Judges too, 'n' we kin inquire round 'mong the folks we know 'n' find out who's the *best* one."

"I think that's a good plan! Mother generally hits on the best thing to do."

"Yes — but twenty-five — er mebbe *fifty* dollars!"

"What's that amount to — set off agenst makin' Dan'l Tewksbury eat crow? Hurry 'n' hitch up now, 'twont take me long to git ready . . . 'n' Sid! you'd best put on your new summer soot — mebbe you'd better call on Will Hubbard's Pa 'n' ask him to d'rect us to a lawyer."

For some half or three-quarters of an hour all was bustle, — and then the three set forth upon their quest of the man who was to force unappetizing bird upon Daniel Tewksbury's digestion.

Which explains why Mrs. Ben Tewksbury was absent from the select gathering at Mrs. Anson Peabody's house on the day after the big quarrel, as recorded in the opening chapter of this narrative.

CHAPTER XIII

IN RELATION TO A SUMMONS

FOR a short time matters rested, seemingly, as they were. Excitement and curiosity began to wane. No one knew of that ride to Litchfield taken by Ben, his wife and Sid.

Mr. Tibbitts, waiting on his customers to merchandise or mail averred that he "guessed the Tewksb'ry 'boys' hed burnt all the powder they was goin' to."

To which some one replied that he "guessed the' was more splutter 'n' powder anyhow."

It was only a day or two after this that Dan'l, upon leaving the house after dinner, became aware of the fact that a stranger had drawn rein at the front door. Dan'l halted.

"This Dan'l Tewksb'ry's place?" queried the stranger. Daniel assenting, he went on. "You him?" "Fur's I know, I be," Daniel answered. "You wantin' me fer any-thing *pertickler*?"

"I 'spose that's accordin' to the way ye happen to look at it," said the stranger, feeling in the breast pocket of his coat and bringing out a folded paper which he handed to Daniel who opened it in a kind of blank wonderment.

COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS.

Worcester, ss:

To — Daniel Tewksbury.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
of Columbia Corners, within our County of Wor-
cester.
..... GREETING:

.....

 of said Columbia Corners.....

WITNESS, John A. Atwell, Esquire, of Litchfield, the twentieth day of June in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and ninety seven.

From the office of
Carpenter and Gammel,
Attorneys for Plaintiff.

With which exchange of amenities the sheriff clucked to his horse and was soon out of sight. Daniel remained

rooted to the spot. His face was set. His jaw dropped. Inwardly he felt a quaking sensation.

After a few moments he bethought himself that Mrs. Cutler or Priscilla or Ned, if he was around, or some one passing might see him and observe something strange in his appearance. So unusual were his sensations he felt as if he must be looking or acting in some queer way. He thrust the paper hurriedly into his trousers pocket and went over to the barn. Upturning a feed bucket he sat down behind one side of the big open door — to keep out of sight of any one who might happen to pass that way.

His seclusion was perfect. Only the hens, wandering in and out of the barn at will, stopped now and then in their chatter to look up at him, turning their heads from side to side to fix their round bright eyes upon him sharply — then walk away lifting their legs high as if to expedite a noiseless escape to tell their sister hens that something quite out of the usual order of things was going on. Daniel took the summons from his pocket, and read it again slowly and with extreme care, lest some if, and or but might have previously escaped him. Then he pondered. There was no denying the fact even to himself—he was dumbfounded. He had threatened frequently, himself, to appeal to the courts for his “rights” and he had often heard similar threats from Ben’s side of the family; he had heard of Ben’s recent call upon the Justice and upon Lawyer Tuffts, but he had thought it only talk. Now the thing had actually come to pass and he shrank for a moment in inward fright in the actual presence of that dread “bogie man” *The Law*. But out of his surprise, his stupefaction, his fright, one feeling began gradually to grow and dominate — resistance — obstinate resistance. Never would he give up to Ben Tewksb’ry. If Ben thought he was going to scare him off he was mistaken. There was law enough for both of them — yes, and lawyers, too.

Daniel brought his clenched fist down on his knee, upon which lay the open paper, with a force that crashed and rattled it with such a crackling that one or two hens, still

lingering near, fled in fright with much squawking and flapping of wings.

Daniel was roused. The call to battle had been sounded. Like the soldier whose first impulse is to turn his back and skulk to cover, he had quaked before that piece of paper with its "S U M M O N S" glaring at him like the enemy darting out of ambush. But the first moment of panicky terror was over, his nerve had come back . . . as he had grasped his axe and rushed to answer blow with blow in the struggle just past, so now, mentally, he sought for a weapon to turn against Ben in the coming struggle in the courts.

He rose with decision, folding the summons and crushing it again into his pocket, and with quickened step he made his way to the pasture. The old white horse, to his surprise and disgust, was haled from his peaceful browsing, hitched to the dilapidated wagon and sent at a rattling pace over the road to the village. Mr. Tibbitts saw the rig coming and leaving a customer in the midst of being waited on to two pounds of sugar and a spool of thread, he rushed to the door, gazing after Daniel's wagon as it drew up in front of Judge Witherspoon's office.

"By Cricky! I *knowed* it!" exclaimed Tibbitts excitedly.

"Knowed what?" said Miss Fitch, who was just coming up the street and thought Tibbitts was looking at her.

"Oh, Miss Fitch, that you? Didn't see you," still looking at Daniel's outfit as he dived down out of the wagon and went into the Justice's office.

"Excuse me, Mr. Tibbitts, but you was lookin' *right* at me."

"Excuse *me*," said Mr. Tibbitts, bringing his eyes to bear upon Miss Fitch, with the effect of seeming to look at the barber pole next door. "You'll suttinly hev to put on glasses 'fore long, Miss Fitch," these remarks all being passed with the utmost good nature.

"I want a quarter of a pound of your best fifty-cent tea, Mr. Tibbitts," said Miss Fitch going in with him. "I can't

drink nothin' but the best," Miss Fitch continued, as Tibbitts tied up the sugar and got the thread for his deserted customer. "A little of the best, I always says, is better than a lot o' cheap stuff. Air you lookin' at the scales, Mr. Tibbitts? Last time I got a quarter of a pound I thought it was the least mite shy. Whut wuz that you wuz sayin' you knowed, Mr. Tibbitts — when I kem up to the door?"

"Did you see Dan'l Tewksb'ry drivin' up to Judge Withersp'n's 'n' goin' in? Well, *that's* what I knowed."

"I knowed that myself — you ought to give me another cent — Mr. Tibbitts. You charged me thirteen cents last time I bought a quarter pound an' this quarter hedn't ought to be but twelve. The paper and string wuth a cent? I'll save the paper 'n' string 'n' fetch it with me next time. Air you lookin' at me, Mr. Tibbitts, or at the cash drawer?"

"I'm lookin' at the cash drawer, Miss Fitch — here's that cent — guess I kin afford to do the han'some thing by the ladies."

"*Whut's* Dan'l Tewksb'ry gone to see Jestice Withersp'n fer, Mr. Tibbitts? I s'pose *that's* what *you* know."

"Of course, Miss Fitch," said Tibbitts importantly, "my o-ficial capac'ity keeps me f'm tellin' a good many things I come putty clus to knowin' — but I hev to be tongue-tied."

"What do you mean, Mr. Tibbitts?" Miss Fitch urged him with lively curiosity. "Ye know the' ain't no resk tellin' *me* — ye know it won't go no further."

"Oh, I ain't sayin' nothin' fer *sure*; *on'y*, when two men is threatenin' to take the law of each other 'n' one of 'em begins to git letters f'm another town with an attorney's name on the envelop, a pusson natchelly'll begin to think suthin', won't they?"

"Who got the letter, Mr. Tibbitts, Ben er Dan'l?" Miss Fitch was a-quiver with interest.

"I don't say 'at *either* of 'em got it — in my o-ficial capac'ity I mustn't say *nothing*."

"O' course not! 'twouldn't d-o-o, Mr. Tibbitts!"

"Then when I see the sheriff drivin' by in a *certain* direc-

tion — 'n' putty soon someone comes drivin' lickity-cut up t' Judge Withersp'n's — I suttinly *suspect* that *suthin's up*; but bein' as I am in a o-ficial position I can't reely make my s'picions *publick*."

"You kin rely on my not hintin' anything. Guess you give me good measure, feels quite some heftier 'n' it did last time," picking up the package and weighing it in her hand. "Good day, Mr. Tibbitts; give my love to Mis' Tibbitts, won't you? I ain't seen her sence sewin' s'ciety. I guess we all got to buckle to if we're goin' to hev our box ready fer that Mish'nery to take back with him. Good-bye, Mr. Tibbitts — good-bye."

She was outside the door and saw that Dan'l's wagon still stood in front of Judge Witherspoon's.

"I'll just run in to Lib Pettigrew's an' quiz 'round," she said to herself. "Won't she be s'prised when I tell her about the letter f'm them 'tarneys 'n' the *sheriff*, 'n' Dan'l Tewksb'ry drivin' to the Jedge's. I couldn't quite make out which one 'twas got the letter, 'n' which one got the sheriff, er if the same one got 'em both, but mebbe Lib kin figger it out."

Mr. Tibbitts, following Miss Fitch to the door, saw old man Goslin across the street and beckoned him over.

"How be ye, Mr. Goslin? Nice weather we're hevin'."

"Moderatin' up a leetle, ain't it? Yes — jesso — jesso."

"Kinda seems to me it's moderatin' down a leetle mite. We kin stan' it."

"Yes — jesso — jesso."

"Heerd any news er rumors o' news lately, Mr. Goslin?"

"Whut kind o' news — babies, weddin's er fu'nels?"

"Nuther." Mr. Tibbitts was swelling out with importance. "Suthin' more onusyul. By hunk! we'll hev doin's 'round here 'fore long, bet a cookie; but I mustn't say no more — in my o-ficial capacity I'm boun' to be secrit ez the grave!"

"Some un hereabouts gittin' into trouble? Yes — jesso — jesso."

"Well, o' course, Mr. Goslin, when the's bad blood between relations the's no tellin' *what'll* come of it."

"That's gospel. Now th' ain't no tellin' whut them childern o' mine'll fix up next t' hector *me*, is the'? Jesso — jesso — 'n' all on account o' that angel on airth if the' ever wuz one — ye know who I mean? Yes — jesso — jesso."

But Mr. Tibbitts had no intention of being switched from his own discoveries to Mr. Goslin's grievances. He deftly turned the conversation back to its desired channel and assisted Mr. Goslin in worming his secrets out of him in spite of his hermetical official sealing. Old man Goslin was too absorbed in his own troubled affair of the heart to be as good a receiver or transmitter as Miss Fitch, but he served to fill the gap until someone else appeared.

Before Daniel Tewksbury had left Judge Witherspoon's office more than one person was saying to another that they had been reliably informed that "the Tewksb'ry boys was goin' fer one another in the courts — hammer 'n' tongs."

Daniel had lost no time in disclosing the object of his visit to Judge Witherspoon. At once after his entrance and exchange of salutations he had brought forth the summons from his pocket and handed it to the Justice.

A hasty glance conveyed to the Judge its import. In a tone of surprise he asked, "What you bring this to *me* for, Dan'l?"

"Thought I'd come in and ask ye somethin' about it. I don't know much about law."

"The most ye need to know about law, Dan'l, is to know enough to keep out of it."

"I was goin' to ask ye, Judge, t' argy my side o' the case — was willin' t' pay ye whatever ye ask — but if ye feel *that way* —"

"See here, Dan'l, I'm givin' ye fust class advice 'n' I ain't chargin' ye a cent for it. You keep out o' *this!*" He brought his palm down with great earnestness upon the

summons as it lay open on his desk. It'll be more trouble an' expense to you than the whole thing's worth. You'd better compromise the matter."

"Compermise! Give in to Ben Tewksb'ry 'n' Mariar 'n' that stuck-up Sid! I'd ruther die!"

"There's other things can happen to ye when you get into law besides dyin'—and they ain't so soon over. I tell you, for your own peace and welfare, that you might better go this minute to Ben Tewksb'ry an' say, 'Here's the tarnal lane—take the hull of it,' than go into this litigation over it."

In the heat of his earnestness he had risen and in pantomime accompanied his words with gestures expressive of handing over the lane like a parcel of goods he was in a hurry to get rid of.

Daniel had been listening and watching him with steadily growing reserve and suspicion. "Seems to me, Jedge," he said, "as if you was kind o' workin' to favor Ben, wantin' me to give up to him—mebbe he's got ye t' work fer *him*—heerd he kem t' see ye a spell ago."

The Judge's friendly enthusiasm fell away from him. He stared at Daniel for an instant, mute, rebuffed, then burst forth in exasperation, "Oh, you go to thunder! You 'n' Ben Tewksb'ry go to thunder together!"

"Thank ye, Jedge, but me 'n' Ben ain't likely to go no place *t'gether*," Daniel answered with a grim setting of the lips.

"Just the same you *are* going somewhere together," retorted the Justice, "and when you get to the end of your tether you'll find yourselves at the little end of the horn, I'll take a bet! Here!" The Justice grabbed the summons from his desk and thrust it out at Daniel. "Take this and do whatever ye like about it—I s'pose ye will anyway! You'll be hollerin' fer advice more'n' once before yer through, but don't come to *me* for any! Folks are always askin' fer *advice*, but they ain't willin' to swallow it if they don't like the taste of it, till they git so sick that nothin'

short of a dispensation from almighty Providence kin pull 'em through."

"Well, now, Jedge. I didn't mean to rile ye up so."

"Ye didn't rile me. I let myself *git* riled. It's agin my principles, too; but cuss it, Dan'l; nater's nater after all. A pan o' sweet milk's boun' to curdle if a bunch o' alum's dropped into it." Here the Judge, restored to good nature, smiled his broad and jovial smile as he went on. "Go ahead with yer picnic, if ye think ye'll enjoy it — mebbe ye'll git your money's worth out of it in bully-raggin."

Daniel, standing outside the Judge's door, disconcerted but not convinced, looked irresolutely up and down the village street. Presently, his eye rested on a black, gilt-lettered sign upon the opposite side of the street, a little down from the Justice's office. Suddenly it seemed to beckon him — to draw him. He climbed into his wagon and drove toward it. History was repeating itself.

Lawyer Tuffts, from his window, saw him coming.

Through Mr. Tibbitts' "o-ficial secretiveness" Mr. Tuffts had been able to surmise that the letter from the stranger lawyers had been written to Ben — that gentleman not having reappeared to claim his services.

As Daniel now drew up before his door with every indication of entering it, Mr. Tuffts gave a shrewd guess as to his purpose and with true judicial impartiality prepared to welcome him.

"Ah — good afternoon, Mr. Tewksb'ry," he remarked affably as Daniel entered.

Daniel stood for an instant, awkwardly silent.

Lawyer Tuffts amiably came to his rescue. "Anything — ah that I can do for you, Mr. Tewksbury?"

"You kin answer me a question — 'fore I go any further," Daniel said slowly. Then, fixing his eyes piercingly on Mr. Tuffts: "You ben hired by Ben Tewksb'ry t' go t' law agin me?"

"No, Mr. Tewksbury, I have not — ah."

"He kem t' see ye 'bout it a spell back, er so I heerd."

"Yes — he did-ah. However — nothing came of it-ah."

"Whut you say t' Ben?"

"Well-ah," Lawyer Tuffts was slowly meditative; "we had a little talk-ah. I told him I didn't know the ins and outs of the case-ah, but if he wanted to retain me, I'd look the whole matter over and give him my opinion as to where he stood-ah. He didn't come back . . . and that's all there was about it-ah."

"You got enny prejudeece to'ards Ben as agin me?"

"In that respect my mind is entirely opern-ah."

"You willin' t' take my side 'n' argy agin him in court — if I want ye to?"

"Why-ah—I shall be very glad to represent your cause-ah. Provided, of course, you honor me by your choice-ah."

Daniel began to mellow a little and grow warm. "Think ye kin beat him fer me? Think I got a strong case?"

"I'm not up on all the points-ah,—haven't seen any of the documents, will and so forth-ah, *but* from all I've heard I think you've got a chance to win-ah."

"Then ye'd advise me — if Ben starts to lawin', to go into court 'n' fight fer my rights?"

"Mr. Tewksbury-ah! the majesty of the lawr-ah is the ark-ah and the refuge-ah of every one who has wrongs to be righted-ah!"

Daniel seemed to be urged on to action by Mr. Tuffts' eloquence. He began fishing in his pocket for the now much creased and crumpled summons. "I'd like to hev you look this over."

Lawyer Tuffts took the paper and scanned the contents carefully.

"I d'know jest what to do 'bout it," Daniel concluded.

Lawyer Tuffts looked up. "You'll have to take action of some kind-ah. You'll have to admit the claim or you'll have to put in a denial-ah."

"I'm goin' to *fight* it — if that's what you mean. He's takin' a high hand — he thinks he'll scare me into givin'

up to him! *Tres-pass!* He can't have me took up fer *tres-pass* on what don't b'long to 'im, kin he?"

"I should say — not-ah. I guess we can hold our own against him and a little bit more-ah."

Daniel's spirits were rising high, but prudence was not entirely forgotten. "But what's this goin' to cost me, Tuffts? How much you goin' to charge?"

"I can't tell exactly-ah — depends on the amount of work-ah — and the length of time-ah and so forth-ah. But I'll make it as reasonable as possible-ah. If you want me to take the case give me-ah —" Mr. Tuffts made a swift mental calculation that if Ben had balked at ten dollars he had better be less exorbitant with Daniel. "Well, say five dollars to bind the bargain, and I'll set right to work in your behalf-ah; that is, if you want to put your interest in my hands-ah."

"I guess you'll do jest as well fer me ez one o' them city chaps — 'n' a blamed sight better! You know me, Mr. Tuffts, 'n' I know you, 'n' ye ought to take more int'rest in me 'n' a stranger would, 'n' I guess mebbe ye won't be so expensive."

It happened that Daniel had that morning disposed of eggs, butter and chickens and various farm products to more than the amount named by Mr. Tuffts, and buoyed by that gentleman's confidence and seeming fearlessness in taking war into the enemy's camp, he paid over the five dollars — in imagination tasting the sweets of victory over his brother Ben, "Mariar" and his especial aversion, "that stuck-up Sid."

So was begun the suit handed down in the annals of law and known to students and practitioners at the bar as "The Lilac Lane Case."

CHAPTER XIV

SATURDAY NIGHT AT THE CORNERS

THE weather being propitious, Saturday evening was always a gala occasion in Columbia Corners. An extra early "tea" was the rule and six o'clock at the latest saw the inhabitants emerging from their homes by ones or twos, or in groups, and wending their way toward the long and somewhat straggly main street of the village, whose "stores" were here and there broken in their continuity by a private dwelling house and "yard."

Baskets or bags, more or less fancy and of greater or less capacity, were much in evidence upon the arms of the older women, many of whom were of necessity buying the Sunday provisions from the Saturday wage; others there were who felt that their appearance in the street promenade called for some excuse and found it in the dire need of forgotten articles to tide them over the Sabbath day.

To supply these foreseen real or pretended wants the village shops remained open until nine o'clock. Their lights, streaming out upon each side of the street up and down its entire length, gave the scene an appearance of uncommon festivity, enjoyed by the crowds strolling back and forth as an indulgence in pleasant dissipation. The hotel and the barber shops did not close their doors until ten o'clock. Many thought this a demoralizing concession and a few of the stricter moralists advocated the nine-o'clock hour for closing. But despite this agitation for reform, the custom, which had obtained for many years, still persisted.

The bank was open until seven o'clock for the benefit of the farmers who often found this the only convenient time for transacting banking business.

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Mrs. Anson Peabody never walked upon the street on Saturday evening. It was another one of the omissions by which she maintained her exclusiveness but her house being upon the main street, as she sat upon her front porch she enjoyed the passing procession and held a sort of informal reception. All who had arrived at the privilege of her acquaintance bowed, or smiled, or spoke as they passed, and those high enough up in the social scale to enjoy a degree of intimacy went in and sat beside her on the "stoop," with much familiar chatter and laughter.

On these nights graybeards and young country men, sometimes accompanied by their women kind, drove leisurely into town to do their weekly shopping, get their weekly mail, and pay their weekly, or occasional, visit to the barber shop for a "shave" or a "hair cut."

The young people were out without excuse — just for the gayety of the occasion. Young girls paraded up and down, by twos and threes, their arms twined about each other's waists; young men whose work was over at five o'clock on Saturdays — dressed in their best — and young farmers, fresh from the barber shop, circulated freely about the streets and from shop to shop, to the envy of some few clerks held to their posts by the demand of business. For these, compensation lay in exchanging comments on current topics with customers — often the aforesaid young ladies, who were attracted by the presence of the fresh-cheeked young man behind the counter and who, after several times passing to exchange a glance of the eye or a bow and a smile, would wander in to make some trifling purchase, with much talking and giggling and the enjoyment which youth is able to extract out of nothing — as a kitten or a puppy finds riotous joy in chasing its own tail or an empty spool dangled from a string.

One or two ice cream and confectionery "parlors" were largely patronized and the photograph gallery next door to the Putnam House was in great favor with the young people.

Its enterprising proprietor had introduced photos by

flashlight, which had proved immensely popular, and on Saturday nights he did a rushing business in "groups," or couples holding hands, or engaged or newly married pairs, one seated, the other standing with one hand dutifully resting upon the shoulder of the sittee.

Large glass cases containing specimens of these works of art and photographs of the leading citizens and the youthful belles and beaux of the Corners stood outside the place and were surrounded on these occasions by admiring patrons.

The adjacent porch of the "Putnam House" on these enlivening evenings was at times crowded. The chairs were always occupied at various angles of tilting backward or forward, threatening disaster to legs and backs of the chairs, if not to their occupants.

The pillars of the porch were braced by the lounging forms of numerous standees, and those not fortunate enough to have secured either chair or post, stood about and waited their chance; for there was much coming and going to and from the street and into the hotel, "soft" drinks being usually in much demand, to say nothing of occasional stronger beverages, and cigars, indulgence in which luxuries was often limited to this one night in the week.

On the piazza all the leading men of the village and the important farmers of the vicinity congregated.

Here was discussed the news gleaned from "The Belvers Weekly Budget," or "The Litchfield Weekly Item." Events of later happening were related by those who had time and money to spend upon the daily papers issued in Litchfield or Millwell. Politics, local and national, came in for many heated arguments, although the immediate news of the Corners was always given the prominence we accord to whatever touches us closely.

Upon this particular evening the crowd upon the porch included Justice Witherspoon, who, as a "regular boarder" at the hotel, and the "big man" at the Corners, professionally, and as many thought, financially, was never without an armchair being placed at his disposal.

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Lawyer Tuffts was also present, and Daniel Tewksbury, who had come in town to give Mr. Tuffts some legal papers he wished to look over, as having a possible value in the coming trial; but while this was the ostensible reason for his coming, the real reason for his appearance upon the hotel piazza was the thought that he would encounter Ben there. For years he and Ben had avoided any place where they were likely to meet each other. They had even crossed to opposite sides of the street to avoid passing one another, but now Daniel wanted to note what kind of spirits Ben seemed to be in, and he wanted to let Ben see that he, Daniel, was in no way frightened, and that he didn't intend to "eat humble pie" for anybody.

Ned Cutler had ridden in town beside his uncle. He had tied the old white horse to the long rail in front of the hotel that formed a continuous hitching post, where, in company with other horses, it was enjoying its evening out, lifting its somnolent head now and again to rub noses, or breathe a word of gossip into the ear of her neighbor; Ned himself had stepped out of the way of the people passing on the narrow walk, and watched the scene, having little to say to anyone. He had come in town because he knew he would see Emily; he hoped he might get the chance of speaking with her.

Across the street at Emily's house, one by one her mother's acquaintances had gone in during the course of their peregrinations, and now she was surrounded by a little coterie of women. Mrs. Tibbitts, Miss Fitch, Mrs. Lunn, and Mrs. Pettigrew were among them and the number was soon increased by the coming of the overworked little wife of the minister, Mrs. Phelps; "Mrs. Dr. Bullock," wife of the leading physician of the Corners, and Mrs. Tuffts.

Mrs. Tuffts, as wife of one of the counsel in the much talked of Tewksbury law suit, came in for an unusual share of attention that added greatly to her sense of importance. She was plied with numerous questions to-night—what lawyer Tuffts thought of the case; what evidence he had

got to support Dan'l's claim; what arguments he was going to advance—to all of which Mrs. Tuffts, assuming a mysterious air as if being able to tell wonderful things, if she would, pursed her lips and averred that—being she was Lawyer Tuffts' wife it wasn't proper for her to say what Lawyer Tuffts thought, nor yet, what he was going to do; but she *would* say *this*, Lawyer Tuffts was certainly going to win the case, and if he *didn't* it wouldn't be any fault of *his*.

It is needless to say that if Mrs. Tuffts had been conversant with her husband's intended way of procedure in the Tewksbury suit nothing would have given her more pride and pleasure than to tell it; but her husband, perhaps having learned discretion from experience, maintained absolute secrecy as to the details of his plan of campaign in this, one of the most, if not *the* most important case that had ever been entrusted to him.

A sudden diversion of interest was brought about by Miss Fitch's exclamation: "Here comes Ben Tewksb'ry 'n' Mariar! They're onusyl late—must be gittin' fash'n'-ble!" Ben Tewksbury's big bay team was coming down the main street at a good pace, Mrs. Ben upon the back seat, erect with an air of self-satisfied importance. As the horses were pulled up in front of Mrs. Peabody's gate Mrs. Ben called out, "I'm comin' in fer a spell, Mis' Peabody."

Mrs. Peabody arose from her chair to welcome Mrs. Tewksbury—a mark of favor she had not shown to any of her other callers—and extended a cordial invitation to Mr. Tewksbury to tie up to their hitching post and come in with his wife.

"Guess I'd better put the hosses up in the hotel shed," Ben replied. "Want to hear whut's goin' on over there ennyway. I'll drop in fer a minute er two 'fore we go home."

"The sight o' so many women folks kind-a scairt him off," Mrs. Ben remarked to the assembled group as she

watched her husband drive off and round the corner toward the rear of the hotel.

"It jest beats all," said Mrs. Tibbitts, "how women folks likes to congergate with women, 'n' men folks with men."

"Yes," laughed Mrs. Pettigrew, "exceptin' the women that likes best to congergate with men 'n' the men that likes best to congergate with women."

Mrs. Tibbitts fluttered in mild indignation. "Mis' Pettigrew, we don't hev no *such* kind in Columby Corners!" At which Mrs. Pettigrew chuckled as with a sudden access of inward amusement.

"We was jest sayin', Mis' Tewksb'ry," Miss Fitch interposed, directly addressing Mrs. Ben, "that you was onusyl late."

Mrs. Tewksbury turned from Mrs. Peabody, with whom she had been speaking confidentially, and allowed her glance to wander over the assembled group, bestowing upon Mrs. Tuffts an icy stare accompanied by a haughty backward toss of the head. "Yes, we *air*! We ben over to Litchfield to-day, 'n' it made us later 'n' common gittin' through our tea. I don't know as we'd a-come at all this evenin' on'y on account o' *Sid*." As I says to Mr. Tewksb'ry, what's the ust o' hevin' hosses 'n' payin' a hunderd dollars fer a new wagon 'n' our only child hev to ride home on a bicycle, after workin' extry late at the bank."

"It's most a wonder to me, your spendin' so much money," commented Mrs. Lunn, admiringly, "that you don't buy one o' them aurtomobills that's comin' in now."

Mrs. Tewksbury waved the suggestion lightly aside. "Oh, I guess me 'n' Mr. Tewksb'ry kin git along with old-fashioned hosses fer the rest of *our* lives; but I s'pose *some* day *Sid*'ll hev an automobeelee 'n' one o' them chefs to run it."

"S'pose you went over to Litchfield to do some pertickler shoppin'?" queried Mrs. Tibbitts.

"No; we went over to see *our lawyer*." Mrs. Ben's tone and manner were overwhelming in their pride and

she swept Mrs. Tuffts with eyes that seemed to be looking at mere space. "He's a splendid man, Mis' Peabody. You know 'im, I guess. He's a *gret friend* of Will Hubbard's father. He's thet smart ez a lawyer! 'n' a prop o' the '*piscopal Church*."

"The law'r 'nd the Prophets, Mariar, the law'r 'nd the Prophets," Mrs. Lunn broke in with impressive gravity.

"Yes, he's a *fast class* lawyer, Mrs. Lunn, so ev'ry body over to Litchfield says."

Mrs. Tuffts rose to go. She reared her head in exact imitation of Mrs. Tewksbury, looking over that lady's head at Mrs. Peabody. "Mr. Tuffts says that the only time he ever heard of Lawyer Carpenter was when he lost a soot for Henry Scales, that lives over to Belvers." With this well-delivered shot at Mrs. Ben, and a murmur of polite leave-taking to Mrs. Peabody, Mrs. Tuffts took her departure, accompanied by Mrs. Bullock. By ones, twos, or threes, the others soon followed, leaving Mrs. Peabody and Mrs. Tewksbury temporarily alone.

Mrs. Pettigrew's familiar laughter was borne back to them on the soft summer air, but only Mrs. Tibbitts and Miss Fitch heard the reason for this particular burst of mirth.

"The fur's beginnin' to fly," said she; "all *we* got to do's to lay back 'n' enjoy the fun."

On the street and over at the hotel, people were a-move. Emily, in company with Dr. Bullock's daughter, a girl of about her own age, had passed the hotel piazza twice, each time with a pretty bow and smile to Ned before he found courage to join them. The step once taken Ned found himself laughing and chattering with the girls, suddenly light-hearted and happy at being in Emily's company even though they were barred by the presence of another from speaking of themselves—of their own love, fears and hopes. The bank had by this time closed and Anson Peabody was with the crowd on the hotel piazza. He was joined there by Ben Tewksbury. Ben, coming upon the

piazza through the hotel hallway from the rear yard, had suddenly encountered Lawyer Tuffts, and to his amazement, discovered "Dan'l." His first impulse was to leave the hotel, but he felt that such an action would be looked upon by both "Dan'l" and his lawyer as a signal triumph for themselves. This was the first time in years that Daniel had appeared upon the hotel piazza on Saturday night, and Ben felt that his presence there now was a direct challenge thrown down to him. So the gathered members of the community were treated to the spectacle of the two brothers boldly confronting one another on common ground, instead of crossing the street or turning the corner to avoid each other.

The papers which Daniel had brought to Mr. Tuffts had been transferred to him when they first met and now, with one or two others, they were discussing the topics of the day. It might have been thought that they did not see Ben when he came upon the piazza, nor note his start of surprise, nor detect his first impulse to leave the place, his reconsideration of it, and the haste with which he sought Anson Peabody, turning his back upon the group with "Dan'l"; but as a matter of fact the little drama of action did not escape either Lawyer Tuffts or Daniel, who inwardly exulted in Ben's discomfiture, nor was it missed by anyone on the piazza.

Aside, out of hearing of either brother, comments and speculation were rife. It was a situation that would have aroused interest and curiosity in a much less provincial gathering, and here, where sensations were rare, it was of paramount importance.

Parson Phelps, thrown alone with Anson Peabody for a moment, asked him confidentially, what he thought the outcome of the trial would be.

"Well," replied Mr. Peabody noncommittally, "it's hard to say. Of course, Ben Tewksbury's got the best lawyer, and he's got the most money."

And Parson Phelps, whose studies of a future life had not prevented him from taking notes on the present one,

mused thoughtfully, "Dan'l Tewksbury will find that a combination hard to beat."

Sid, and Will Hubbard, sauntering along the sidewalk in front of the bank, noticed Emily and the young Bullock girl walking with Ned.

"Ned Cutler and Cousin Emily seem to be getting along together pretty well. Look out, or he'll be as good as his name — he'll *cut* you out," said Will, teasingly.

Sid's brow drew down in a frown of annoyance. "If there's one thing I can't stand, Will, it's your jokes. Work 'em off on Jen — she'll stand for anything from you. Probably Ned Cutler forced his company on Emily."

"Let's go up and take the girls away from him," Will suggested.

"You *do* have a bright idea once in awhile — come on."

As Sid and Will stopped in front of Ned and the girls the three halted involuntarily. Ignoring Ned, Will, smiling and lifting his hat said, "Oh, here you are at last; we've been looking all over the place for you! Miss Nellie, will you come across to Mitten's and have some ice cream?"

"Oh, thank you! Of course I will!" exclaimed Nellie Bullock, delighted, leaving Ned without further ceremony and starting to cross the street with Will.

"Wait a minute," called Sid, "Emily and I'll go with you. Come on, Emily. If Will gets the start of us there won't be any ice cream left."

Sid, ignoring Ned, had stepped between him and Emily, and by the suddenness and assurance of his address, tried to sweep her away from Ned as easily as Will had taken Nellie; but Emily, drawing back with a little air which her own mother could not have surpassed in checking too great presumption, answered quietly, "Excuse me, please. Just now I am not at liberty to go; thank you." She turned to Ned and they walked on.

Mrs. Peabody had just a moment before seen the girls walking down the street with Ned. She had been annoyed, and now, guessing something of what had hap-

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pened from Sid's appearance of chagrin, she rose hastily and came out to the front gate. "Emily," she called. Then louder. "Emily!"

"It's mother — she's calling me." Emily paused in her walk, looking across the street.

"It's time for you to come home," said Mrs. Peabody.

"I must go, Ned, but it's only because I don't want to displease mother — and make a lot of talk. You know I can't bear Sid."

"Emily!" her mother called again; this time with more authority. Emily, with a hasty "Good night, Ned," left him and crossed the street with Will, Sid and Nellie Bullock, who were waiting for her.

At this same moment "old man" Goslin came out of the barber shop next door to the hotel. The fringe of gray beard encircling his chin had been neatly trimmed, his cheeks and his neck were fresh shaven; his hair, thin and scattering, was cut short, well oiled and brushed down over his head. He was redolent of bay rum and bergamot as he stepped forth with trembly briskness and set his hat upon his head at a jaunty angle.

Mrs. Lunn, loitering upon the opposite corner with Mrs. Tibbitts, Miss Fitch and Mrs. Pettigrew, at this point developed serious uneasiness over the passing of time. "I declare!" she exclaimed, "I didn't hev no idee how time was flyin'. I didn't mean to stay mor'n a few minutes when I fust come out. I got to go home 'n' finish trimmin' my bunnit er I won't hev a thing fit to put on my head to go to meetin' in the mornin'."

As Mrs. Lunn hurried away Mrs. Pettigrew began to laugh in a soft and chuckling way that at once roused the interest of Miss Fitch and Mrs. Tibbitts, and when Mrs. Pettigrew, following Mrs. Lunn with one eye, and "old man Goslin," stepping quick and lifting his feet high with a nervous energy born of the occasion, with the other, saw him meet Mrs. Lunn at the corner and follow her in the direction of her house — when Mrs. Pettigrew, seeing this, leaned against a fence post for support while she

wiped the dripping tears of hilarious delight from her cheeks, Mrs. Tibbitts could no longer restrain her impatience.

"Fer the good land sake, Lib Pettigrew! What *air* you laughin' at *now?* I don't see nothin' funny."

"If I told ye," said Mrs. Pettigrew, struggling fer breath to speak, "ye'd know es much ez *I* do! but ye ain't got nothin' but button holes where yer eyes ought to be, er ye'd a-seen jest what I seen." With this she went into another spasm of laughter which set the other women going in sympathy, Mrs. Pettigrew managing to tell them at intervals, "ye won't need to go to Belvers this summer . . . to see any circus. . . . The's goin' to be two er three in Columby Corners . . . that can't be beat anywheres."

Later, as Mrs. Tibbitts was going part way home with Miss Fitch, they passed one of "old man" Goslin's sons and his eldest daughter urging their horse to a swift gait along the road, coming from the direction of their farm.

"I wonder if anything's happened," said Mrs. Tibbitts to Miss Fitch, as they stopped to watch the wagon in its flight. It stopped in front of the hotel and they saw the son get out and look at the horse tied to the rail, which was known to every one as "The Goslin's mare." Then he went into the hotel. In a few minutes he came out hastily and went into the barber shop.

"He's lookin' fer the old man," said Mrs. Tibbitts.

Presently he came out and, jumping into the wagon, returned along the street and turned the corner, driving on past the Widow Lunn's. They looked long and hard at the house as they drove by, slacking their speed as they neared the house and passing with an appearance of stealthy curiosity. Once well past they turned, coming back with the same watchfulness. Stopping, they seemed to be talking together, and coming to some decision, for suddenly they turned and, driving quickly, drew up in front of the house. The son, alighting from the wagon went softly up to the door and, without knocking, went in.

Mrs. Tibbitts and Miss Fitch huddled closer together, wide-eyed with astonishment.

In a moment or two young Goslin reappeared, leading his father by the arm, and, in spite of his protests, down the street, the daughter following slowly in the buggy. At the corner the son turned his father's steps toward the hotel and once more took his seat beside his sister, keeping a watchful eye upon the old man as he went with aged step down street, unhitched his horse and, climbing into the wagon with difficulty, turned the mare's head toward home — the son and daughter following.

"Well, I never!" ejaculated Miss Fitch.

"*Ain't* we been geese?" queried Mrs. Tibbitts. "*That's* what Lib Pettigrew was laughin' at." Both women were shaking with suppressed laughter. "'N' no wonder!" "Who'd ever a-thought o' old man Goslin shinin' up to the widder Lunn?"

"'N' who ever would a-thought the Widder Lunn was sweet on old man Goslin!"

"'N' Kate 'n' William Goslin *boun'* to break it up!"

"I allus said that the old man's childern ud keep 'im to home nights. It is a reg'lar circus, Mis' Tibbitts, jest as Mis' Pettigrew said."

"It's *wus* 'n' a circus!" answered Mrs. Tibbitts, giving free vent to her mirth; "I declare to goodness! if it ain't ez funny ez that there op'ry piece of Romeo 'n' Julieetty."

Ned, after Emily had left him, went back slowly to the hotel piazza. From there he saw Mrs. Peabody's cordial greeting to Sid; he saw the young people go into the house and presently through the open windows of the parlor were borne to his ears music from the piano and voices mingled in snatches of songs, and laughter. He stood in deep thought for awhile, looking toward the Peabody house and listening. Then suddenly some lines of determination came about the mouth, and a look of dogged obstinacy settled in his eyes. A likeness to the Tewksbury's came out — he was not without certain character-

istics of that race, after all. He roused himself and looking over at Judge Witherspoon saw that he was for the moment alone. He went over and sat down beside the Justice.

"Judge, I'd like to have a talk with you — as soon as it's convenient for you to give me the time." So absorbed was Ned in the purpose now forming in his mind he was unaware that he had approached the Justice without any of the usual formalities of greeting. This, and a certain troubled quality in his voice caused the Judge to look at him with quick, keen interest.

"No time as good as the present," he responded genially; "I'm tired settin' on this blamed hard bottom wooden chair — let's take a walk." Once on the sidewalk, the Judge continued: "I don't know how 'tis with other folks but with me walkin' 's a great help to talkin.' If I could argue my cases runnin' round a mile track 'stead o' standin' in a court room, I'd be the Demosthenes o' the county." They walked for a few minutes in silence, then the Judge turned to Ned. "Come, boy," he said, encouragingly, "speak up, whatever's on your mind, now's yer chance — spit it out!"

"Judge Witherspoon, I've made up my mind. I'm going away. I've studied pretty hard — as hard as I could . . . all last winter at school . . . ever since you began lending me books . . . but it's no use to stay here . . . I can't get any farther . . . I can't learn any more . . . I can't earn any money . . . I can't get ahead . . . I can't be anybody . . ."

The Judge made no immediate reply. He seemed to be turning something over in his mind. At length he spoke. "Of course, if you liked farming you could get to be a good farmer. A good farmer's as good as anybody."

"Of course — if I liked it . . . maybe I'd have a farm of my own some time . . ."

"I s'pose — if you stay here — you'll come into your Uncle Dan'l's farm in the nat'ral course of events."

"I don't know; anyway, I'm not going to stay. If it was

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my father . . . that maybe would be different . . . but working for Uncle Dan'l . . . it's worse than being a hired man . . . a hired man gets wages . . . it's more like being a slave . . . and Uncle Dan'l thinks he's doing something charitable to keep us . . . I thought perhaps you'd approve of my going . . . but I just want to tell you, Judge, that I'm going, anyway."

"S'pose I tell ye that I *don't* approve of yer goin'; s'pose I tell ye that I'll be as mad as a hatter if ye *do* go?"

Ned drew a quick breath. "I'd be awful sorry, Judge; but I'd go. I can't stay here any longer."

"*Sure?*"

"*Sure!*"

"Well, then," said the Judge with a return of his easy good nature, "I don't mind tellin' ye that I won't be a bit mad."

Ned's face shone with delighted surprise. "*You won't?*"

"You see," the Judge went on, "I've been wonderin' how long it 'ud be before you made a break — or if you was goin' to make one at all. I made up my mind to stand by ye if ye *did* go — but I wan't goin' to put in a word edge-wise to egg ye on. I wan't goin' to be responsible, but now ye've made up your mind, *independent* — see here, Ned, you're goin' to college if you want to go. I've got money that's rustin'. I'll pay your way 'n' be *hanged* to yer Uncle Dan'l."

Ned couldn't speak; he didn't know how to express his feelings; for a matter-of-fact, everyday, farmer boy to tell how his heart was suddenly near to bursting with the warm strong wave of surprise, of pleasure, of comfort, of gratitude, that had swept it through and through at the Judge's splendid kindness was manifestly impossible. He struggled to find words, but he was ashamed of the meagreness, the lameness of his thanks.

Perhaps the Judge saw and understood as well as if Ned had been more eloquent.

"But, you see, Judge, it wouldn't do for me to go even with your paying my expenses — it would take too long;

three years—maybe more. I've got to be *earning* some money—I ought to be taking care of Ma and Priscilla."

"Well, what plans you got? What ye think ye can do?"

"It seems to me that the best thing for me to do is to get on some survey as a chainman and try to work up. What do you think?"

The Judge meditated for a moment before answering. Secretly he was not ill pleased with Ned's spirit of independence. "I don't know but it's a pretty good plan."

"You know I've got a fair start in mathematics. I'm not so strong yet in trigonometry—but I can keep on studying and with a little practical experience I think I'd soon know enough to get a job as transit man. After that—well, I don't know what after that—but I'd earn three or four dollars a day if I was just a transit man."

"That's pretty good reasoning, Ned. Guess your head ain't all skull. Mebbe I can help ye out a little on this, too. The's just been a franchise granted to run a trolley f'm Litchfield to Boston goin' through Union Junction 'n' Millwell. One of the men way up in the company is a friend o' mine. He lives in Boston. I'll write to him—mebbe I can get ye placed as chainman when they start the survey."

And again Ned was conscious of the inadequacy of words. "I don't know why you're so good to me—I guess it's just because you're so good yourself."

"Tut—tut, boy! Don't let enny o' the church members hear ye say that," the Judge answered, with a hearty laugh.

The Ben Tewksburys driving on their homeward way passed the Judge and Ned as they clasped hands in a friendly "Good night."

Mrs. Ben, leaning suddenly forward, seized her husband by the arm. "Look there, Ben! Sid! See Jedge Wither-sp'n hand 'n' glove with Ned Cutler! I guess ye kin be pretty glad ye didn't pay no attention t' his advice about the lane—ner git him fer yer lawyer neither; he suttinly favors Dan'l Tewksb'ry's folks."

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Nine o'clock had struck. The lights were out in the shops, only the hotel and barber shop remaining open to a few belated men. This night at the Corners, distinguished from every other night in the week (up to nine o'clock) by scenes of unusual brilliance was, after that hour, distinguished by an aspect of more than usual deadness.

No occasional groups of laughing, chattering people returned home from a social evening at — perhaps — midnight; no family tarried upon its front "stoop"; no lovers strolled in the moonlight; no young man lingered with his sweetheart; no young lady entertained her "beau"; all was hushed, quiet and dark — the lights shut in with discreetly drawn blinds.

Saturday night, after nine o'clock, was dedicated to a solemn rite. It was bath night in Columbia Corners.

CHAPTER XV

TOUCHING BUSINESS AND HEARTS

JUDGE WITHERSPOON had at once written to Mr. Searles, the friend whom he had mentioned as being interested in the road, asking if a place could be made for Ned. He urged young Cutler's wish to attach himself to the engineering corps that would be engaged in this work, in the earnest desire to study the profession practically — not having ways nor means to attend college. The Judge hoped that a plain statement of Ned's ambitions and pecuniary limitations might rouse his friend to take an extra degree of interest in placing him in some sort of position with the engineering force.

An almost immediate reply was received from Mr. Searles, stating that the preliminary work was a little slow in starting and that he, himself, had nothing to do with the making up of the engineering corps. However, he would bear the case in mind. He would make inquiries and if possible to place the young man he would do so out of friendship for the Judge, if for no other reason.

And then — silence and waiting.

During this time Sid was making progress at the bank. His bond had been arranged to the satisfaction of all concerned and he was regularly fulfilling his duties to his mother's great pride and joy, and also, it must be stated, with a greater feeling of satisfaction in his father's mind than that indulgent parent had harbored for some time in regard to him.

It looked as if that young man had now really started on a career of usefulness.

"O' course, the salary ain't much to speak about," his mother would say to her acquaintances, "but he wants to

learn the bizness. I'm jest as pleased 'n' more so thet he giv up the doctorin'. Soon's he learns bankin'—” here Mrs. Ben paused as if restraining herself upon the point of disclosing a most important piece of information. “But, land!” she would continue, “'tain't no use tellin' things beforehand—folks on'y thinks it's braggin'. It's best to wait 'n' let 'em see fer themselves. The's *one* thing sure, *Sid's* boun' to come up—the' won't be no sech thing ez keepin' 'im down!”

All of which was food for mirth with Mrs. Pettigrew. “Mari' thinks Sid's like a batch o' bread that ye kin coddle into raisin' if ye fuss with it 'n' keep turnin' it a-fore the fire to keep it warm,” she said, and added, with her characteristic chuckle of delight, “but I guess the' ain't no danger o' Sid's raisin' so high 't he'll run over the pan onless he hes consid'ble more 'east stirred into 'im.”

But there were others who had a better opinion of Sid, chief among whom was Mrs. Peabody; and if sundry of her and of Mrs. Pettigrew's friends indorsed the latter's view of him, they took pains to conceal it, not caring to risk the loss of Mrs. Peabody's favor.

It must be confessed, too, that Sid's stock had gone up considerably by the fact of Mr. Peabody's having taken him into the bank even though Mrs. Pettigrew turned the shafts of her ridicule upon his position. In fact, more than one who had publicly sniffed at Sid and his mother's pretensions for him, and who felt that they had been warranted in “turning up their noses,” in view of his failure to “hang out his shingle,” or in fact, to do anything but “loaf” around and “put on high an' mighty airs” ever since his return from college, now began to let their noses down to a normal angle—and even a little lower—in their sage reflections . . . “Sid bein' reely took into the bank . . . 'n' Anson Peabody pushin' him along . . . 'n' Miss Peabody sort o' settin' her cap at him fer Em'ly . . . well, the' wan't no tellin' *where* he might land! . . . mebbe pres'dent o' the bank some day . . . mebbe 'twas the collidge larnin' done it

. . . mebbe Mariar 'n' Ben hedn't ben sech fools ez they'd all laid out, after all."

It was about this time that Mrs. Peabody took occasion for a "heart to heart" talk with her daughter — the first in which she had ever seriously spoken to that young lady concerning the subject of her future, her own and her father's views concerning it, and especially upon that most important matter — her marriage.

It was the latter part of a pleasant afternoon. The outer doors of the bank were closed but Mr. Peabody and Sid were still at work inside.

Will had just gone over to the bank. "He was going to wait for Sid — maybe he'd go home with him," he said to his aunt, leaving her and Emily sitting on the front porch.

Mrs. Peabody was engaged upon some trifling bit of fancy work, but Emily sat idly upon the step, her elbow on her knee, chin in hand, gazing dreamily into space.

Mrs. Peabody's glance wandered at intervals from her work to Emily, unconsciously enjoying the pretty, gentle pensiveness of the girl, inwardly warming at the thought of Emily's sweetness, her goodness, her lifelong docility.

"Emily will never give us any worry," was her mental tribute to the girl's whole dutiful life. "She'll be guided by us now — just as she always has been." Mrs. Peabody felt that the psychological moment was upon them.

"Emily," she said suddenly, "have you ever thought about getting married?"

Emily started, and a startled flush of crimson swept her face, leaving it paler than before.

"Why, mother," she faltered, "what makes you ask me that?"

Neither the start nor the flush had escaped Mrs. Peabody's notice, but both were quite natural to a modest young girl, being broached with such a question, she thought. She went on with gentle persistency.

"You are nearly nineteen now; most girls as old as

that begin to look forward to marrying, or at least to an engagement."

Emily plucked nervously at the flowers on her hat which was in her lap.

"Why, mother, you're not in a hurry to get rid of me, are you?"

"Emily! of course not; but that is not the way to put it. Both your father and I feel that we wish to see you settled happily and securely in life. We wish to be sure that you are married to the right man; that is, we feel that you are still too young to *marry*; but we think it would be an excellent thing if you were engaged — to such a young man as we could all approve; for instance — Sidney Tewksbury."

After a slight pause, Emily said with much decision:

"I don't like Sid Tewksbury!"

"That is just a notion you have taken," her mother replied tranquilly. "You *can* like him if you *try* — and I know you *will* try — now that I tell you both your father and myself would be much pleased to look upon Sidney as our future son-in-law."

"I don't see why!" Emily burst out, protesting; "I don't see *why* you want him — *I* don't!"

There was a hint of rebelliousness in Emily's tone that surprised Mrs. Peabody. It was something she had not looked for but she answered with calm, judicial reasoning.

"We feel that he would make you a good husband," she said. "Your father is much pleased at the way he is taking hold of things at the bank. He thinks Sidney will advance rapidly. It would be a great relief to your father as he grows older to have a young man — someone belonging to us — who could take the cares of the business off his shoulders. Sid has a college education; in time he will inherit a very respectable property; he is a young man of good moral character. Yes, that's one great thing we approve in Sid — his fine moral character and his quiet, studious habits. Another thing," here Mrs. Peabody's voice

softened affectionately, "so far from our wanting to get rid of you, Emily, *one reason* we want you to *marry Sid* is so we can keep you right here with us. I might have sent you to Litchfield to your Aunt Hubbard's to find a husband among those city young men—but that would have taken you to live somewhere away from us."

Here Emily's eyes, suffused with tears, were lifted to her mother's. "And then," Mrs. Peabody went on, steadying her voice, "we wouldn't know anything about a strange young man's *principles*, nor what kind of a life he had been living before he married you. We do know all about Sid. I dare say you have never thought much about all this, but now, I've put so many things before you favorable to your marrying Sid I'm sure you'll begin to think about it as we do."

"But mother—suppose it's all so—and I *don't like him*—I *can't* like him?"

The keen distress in Emily's voice was patent to her mother's ears, but her understanding was dulled by the common conviction of elders that they know better than youth itself what is best for it, especially as regards matrimony—and we must admit the frequent accuracy of this belief.

"*You will like him*," Mrs. Peabody answered with the assurance of one who was used to directing the thoughts and actions of others. "There is no reason why you should *not* like him if you try. Mrs. Tewksbury tells me that she has talked with Sid and that he is only too anxious for an engagement. It wouldn't surprise me if he spoke to your father at any time. But of course we are not *hurrying* you, Emily. I just want you to be thinking about it and preparing yourself for it."

Emily answered slowly, "So long as there's no hurry about it, mother, we can just let the whole matter rest for a while—can't we?"

"Why, yes,—I suppose so, Emily."

At this Emily rose as if to go, settling her flowered hat upon her pretty fair hair.

"Oh, by the way, Emily, there's another thing I want to speak about. I've noticed you two or three times lately talking to Ned Cutler. Saturday night you were walking with him. Your father and I both disapprove of your having anything to say to him. So if he happens around where you are again, don't notice him."

Emily turned with flashing eyes and trembling lips. "Not notice him! Why shouldn't I, mother?"

"Ned Cutler is nobody! He has had no education and he has no prospects—he is just a common farm hand—except that the farm he works on belongs to his uncle. I don't wish you to associate with rough and common young men like that—they are not suitable company for you."

"Oh, mother—mother—mother!" Emily cried out passionately, the tears blinding her eyes, unable longer to control herself. "Ned is a great deal better and nicer in every way than Sid is—only you won't see it. You won't know him and find out what he is—just because he's poor and has no one to help him—but I tell you, mother, he's worth a *hundred* Sid Tewksbury's."

"Emily!" her mother had dropped her fancy work and risen, shocked, authoritative. "I see I didn't speak to you a moment too soon, though I never dreamed! No doubt this young man has tried to worm himself into the good graces of the daughter of an influential family. You must promise me, Emily, that you will never speak to Ned Cutler again."

"Oh, I know there's no use trying to get you to think differently about Ned," Emily answered with long quivering sobs that made speech almost impossible; "but you mustn't ask me to *stop speaking* to him. I couldn't hurt him like that—no, I couldn't do it." As she finished speaking she ran past her mother, into the house, up to her own room, and there, locking the door, she threw herself upon the bed in an agony of silent weeping.

And Mrs. Peabody, left alone on the porch, surprised, disturbed, heard in those words, "I couldn't hurt Ned like that—no, I couldn't!" an undertone of resoluteness that

was new and strange coming from her docile daughter.

She looked anxiously over at the bank. "I wish Anson would come home so I can tell him," she whispered to herself in great perturbation of spirit. "*I don't know what* we're going to do about Emily."

CHAPTER XVI

MOTHER'S FEARS

To Mrs. Peabody's great relief, Mr. Peabody, followed by Sid and Will, soon made his appearance. They came directly across the street, Sid wheeling his bicycle. They came inside the gate, Will going round to the back of the house for his wheel, while Mr. Peabody established himself comfortably in his own particular armchair upon the "stoop," at once taking a newspaper from his pocket in which he speedily became absorbed.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Peabody," said Sid, lifting his hat deferentially. "Is Emily at home?"

"Oh, yes — yes — she's home — she's in her room . . . I believe she has a headache."

"Oh! I thought perhaps she'd like to come out for a bicycle ride. Will's going part way home with me."

"I'm sorry; you'll have to excuse Emily today. I'll tell her that you asked her to go."

Will here appearing with his wheel, he and Sid departed, Sid leaving the proper and stereotyped regrets for Emily's headache and hopes that she might soon be better.

As they rode away Will called out to his aunt, "If I'm not back by ten o'clock, don't worry — perhaps I'll stay all night at Sid's."

Mrs. Peabody nodded an agreeable acquiescence and in a few moments the young men had passed out of sight.

"What's that about Emily? Got a headache, did you say?" Mr. Peabody looked over the top of his paper long enough to ask the question.

"That's what I *said*, but that was just a decent excuse. Oh, Anson! I've got to tell you something about Emily. Do put down that paper. I want to talk with you."

Mr. Peabody let his paper fall to his knee as he turned an anxious and startled gaze upon his wife. Never had she spoken of Emily with such distress and anxiety except at a long past indisposition of the girl's which the doctor had said threatened typhoid fever.

"What's the matter with Emily — is she down-right sick?"

"*Sick?* I don't know as it would be so bad if she *was*. We'd know just what we had to fight — and she'd do whatever we or the doctor told her to do — but *now!*"

"See here, Julia, if you've got anything to tell me about Emily, tell it outright and don't keep me on tenter-hooks while you're talkin' in riddles."

"Anson," said Mrs. Peabody, sinking her voice to a sepulchral half whisper, "*Emily's* got a *fancy* for *Ned Cutler*."

"For *Ned Cutler!* Nonsense, Julia; you're always imagining things."

"It isn't imagination, Anson — as you'll find out if you don't take *some* kind of prompt action."

"What makes you think such a thing?"

"Well, I was talking to her just a little while ago — of the expediency of beginning to think about her future; *you* know, as a mother *should* seek the confidence of a girl who is approaching marriageable age; and I spoke to her about *Sid* — about our liking him so much — and his wanting to marry her — and — well, you know — just trying to guide her into looking on him as the one we considered the best one for her to marry."

"Now that's the very worst thing you could have done, Julia," broke in her husband. "Just the very minute you began to point out that Sid was the one you expected her to marry and the best young man she could possibly find to marry, she wouldn't have him for love nor money. Wasn't that the way of it?"

"Something like that I must confess," faltered Mrs. Peabody, chagrined to find that in her husband's opinion what

she had thought very diplomatic tactics had been altogether mistaken ones.

"But where does that Ned Cutler come in?" queried Mr. Peabody, crossing one leg over the other and leaning back in his chair with the air of one settling himself to learn the ins and outs of a thing which could be cleared up to the satisfaction of everybody when the facts were all in. Mrs. Peabody felt the reflex of this assurance and began to think that she had perhaps taken Emily too seriously, had attached undue importance both to her expressed antipathy to Sid and her warm defense of Ned.

"Well, after I had spoken to Emily about Sid, and she had declared very positively that she did not and could not like him, I thought best to drop the matter for the present. Then I cautioned her against being seen on the street again with young Cutler—several people spoke about her walking up and down Main Street with him the other Saturday evening. I told her, in fact, not to speak to him again. Of course, Anson, I hadn't the least idea *then* that she would care anything about it."

"Then she sort of took the bit in her teeth, I suppose?"

"Anson, she wasn't what you'd call saucy, or anything like *that*; but I never saw her flare up so about anything in all her life. She flew out at me and said Ned Cutler was better every way than Sid Tewksbury—only we wouldn't see it—and that she couldn't, she just *couldn't* hurt his feelings by not speaking to him. Then she burst out crying and ran up to her room."

Mr. Peabody thoughtfully stroked his beard, evidently pondering what his wife had related to him.

"Now, what do you think, Anson?"

"Well," he answered thoughtfully, after another moment for reflection. "I think you've been making a mountain out of a mole hill. Em'ly's sympathetic. She's always known Ned Cutler—and I s'pose she's sorry because he isn't so fortunate as Sid is. She summed up the whole size of the matter when she said she couldn't hurt his feelings."

"You really think that's all there is to it, Anson?" Mrs. Peabody's tone still betrayed anxiety. She wanted to believe that her husband's view was the right one but she could not quite banish her doubts.

"Of course that's all there is to it! Em'ly's too young yet to know who she is or who she isn't in love with. Don't pester her about it one way or the other — just let her alone. When she's a year or two older she'll see Sid's good qualities and she'll fall in with our wishes of her own accord." Thus with true masculine discernment Mr. Peabody disposed of his daughter's affairs of the heart.

"I hope you're right," was Mrs. Peabody's somewhat dubious reply. Then, after a moment, "But don't you think it would be a good thing for her to go away for a little while? We could send her to Will's mother for a month or two."

"It might be a good thing — give her something new to think about for awhile, anyway."

"I'll send her tomorrow," was Mrs. Peabody's energetic decision. The immediate mental survey of Emily's wardrobe which she began to take with a view to quick action in the packing of her trunk was interrupted by the ringing of the tea bell.

They were just seated at the table when Emily came in. All traces of tears had been well bathed from her eyes, her toilet had been freshened and with the buoyancy of youth she had recovered almost her usual manner and spirits. Mr. Peabody gave his wife a "didn't I tell you so?" glance, but otherwise the entire matter was apparently forgotten by all three of them. In the midst of general talk on safe and unimportant topics Mrs. Peabody found time to reflect that perhaps next week would be soon enough for Emily to go away — which would give time to have that pattern of embroidered white mull made up for her — she would really need it if she went to Litchfield . . . it would be very pretty made full with just a deep hem . . . and her new flowered sash would be just the thing. . . . very dainty and becoming. . . .

In the meantime Sid and Will had found plenty to discuss. As soon as they were well clear of the village street, where they might have been overheard, Will said:

"The girls will be looking for us out at Thibeau's to-night. How are we going to manage it?"

"I don't know. I'm getting nervous, Will! If we're found out going there it would dish *me* with your Uncle and Aunt Peabody. I can't afford *that*."

"Let's start right after supper. We can say we're going for a ride—exercise—that sort of thing—and we can get back by ten o'clock."

"Ten o'clock nothing!"

"Well—if we're an hour or two later we can think up some excuse."

"Oh, all right. I'll go this time, but we'll have to hit on some other way of seeing the girls or cut 'em out. The old man was mighty close to getting onto me before I went into the bank. I've had to be pretty careful ever since."

After supper, Ben and Mrs. Tewksbury watched the young men as they started off ostensibly for a ride for the benefit of their health, "after Sid being cooped up in doors all day," and with the promise of being back by ten o'clock—probably before that hour.

"But," Sid added, "I'd better take the key of the side door so you won't have to sit up for us. I know you like to be in bed by nine o'clock."

"I'm gittin' prouder o' that boy of our'n ev'ry minute," Mrs. Ben exclaimed as a turning in the road finally shut from her sight the forms of the young men bending lightly over their handle bars. "Sometimes I'm afeard I'm too proud of him; but I guess anybody else would be just the same if they hed a son ez smart 'n' good and good-lookin' ez Sid is. He is suttinly good-lookin'."

"Sid's all right!" Ben was perhaps as appreciative of Sid's perfections but not so expressive.

Mrs. Ben went on, "You're pretty glad *now* I guess that I insisted in his goin' to collidge, ain't ye? If he

hedn't most likely he'd be just hoein' 'n' plowin' now same's Ned Cutler is, 'stid o' bein' started in the bankin' business 'n' hand 'n' glove chums with one o' the fust young men in Litchfield."

"D'know but that's so," Ben answered a bit slowly, yet agreeing with his wife. He was now beginning to feel that the time and money had not been wasted and to regard the mortgage as a burden which in the end might be justified as there now seemed some chance of Sid's helping to clear it off. Nevertheless, deep down in his heart he would have preferred that same "ploughing and sowing" kind of a son so despised by Mrs. Ben. He would have taken more interest in the farm, he thought, if his son was to plow and sow and reap after him. Of course Sid would inherit it some day but that would be only to sell it—and buy a home somewhere else, for if Sid was going to be a banker he wouldn't want to keep the farm. . . . And somehow Ben had a feeling come over him that was nearer to sympathy and sentiment than anything that had crept into his heart since his long-past, almost-forgotten youth—he would have liked to feel that Sid was going to live on the farm when he was gone.

At half past nine Ben was nodding in his chair. He made an effort to keep awake until "the boys" got back to do honor to Sid's "company," but he had been up and doing since four o'clock in the morning and nature demanded sleep.

"Go to bed, Ben," his wife urged; "I'll wait up awhile yit—they'll surely be here in a few minutes—but you go to bed er you won't be fit fer nothin' to-morrow."

"Guess I kin stan' it for a few minutes longer if *you* kin," replied Ben, loth to give up his purpose; but when ten o'clock struck and still no sign of their returning—

"'Tain't no use waitin' any longer," Mrs. Ben said. "Come, Ben, let's lock up 'n' go to bed, both of us."

Ben was only too glad to comply, and getting about as quickly as his half-benumbed condition permitted, doors were locked, lights, all save one, put out, his clothes off, his

long unbleached cotton nightshirt donned. Once between the sheets, sleep quickly shut down upon his senses and Sid, Will, banks, college, lawsuits and Mrs. Ben (before the bureau removing the pins from her sleek, wavy tresses), sank into the land of nowhere.

When his heavy breathing assured Mrs. Ben that he was asleep, she replaced the few hairpins, by whose removal she had made a feint of preparing for bed, and tiptoed out of the room. She softly unlocked the front door and stepping out upon the piazza, sat down in the big chair to wait. "They'll surely be here in a few minutes," she said, "an' it will seem cheerfuller fer me to show Will up to the spare room."

She was very sleepy and, in spite of all she could do, she fell into fitful snatches of slumber, waking up every now and then with a start as her head jerked forward, helpless and uncontrolled.

So time passed. Then, after a longer nap than the first spasmodic snatches, she roused enough to wonder what the time could be, and, going inside to look at the clock, to her amazement found it was twelve o'clock. She was wide awake instantly. Fear banished all trace of sleep. What had happened? Something must have *happened* to keep them like this. Yes, something *must* have happened. Had one of them fallen from his wheel — and the other be kept to care for him? Had they been attacked, perhaps by rough men, thinking they had money? With a terrible fright she recalled that both of them wore gold watches. She had heard of people being murdered for a gold watch. Or had they been run over? There was a railroad track some miles away. They had gone in that direction. *Could they have been . . .*

Frantically she went down to the gate in front of the house as swiftly as she could walk, to look up and down the road in the vain hope that she might see them coming.

The night had grown a little dark with clouds portending rain. She could not see far along the road. She strained her ears listening for the faintest sound of their coming.

Nothing but the soft, misty suffing of the leaves fell upon her ears.

She hurried back to the house. It seemed to her that she had been down there listening for a long time. It was just eight minutes past twelve.

So the moments dragged along. When she could no longer, in her anxiety, remain in the house, she ran down to the gate so that if by chance they were coming she would know it that much the quicker. Once or twice she went out along the highway in the hope of meeting them. Momently her fears and anxiety grew. Something must be terribly wrong! Sid had never stayed out like this before. An hour that seemed an eternity of waiting crept slowly by. To her excited nerves came cries of distress. Calls for help from Sid, mangled on the railroad track — it was that! It was *that!* *The railroad track!* The clock struck one. She could endure no longer. Twice she had been to Ben's side to waken him, but each time she had restrained herself, thinking, "Mebbe they'll be here in a few minutes." . . . But now she could wait no longer. She must waken him or shriek aloud in her terror. He must call the hired man; they must saddle their horses and start out to see if they could find any trace of Sid — go to the railroad track — a faint fumbling sound fell upon her ears as she was rushing frantically to the bedroom to waken her husband. She stopped, half choking. The sound came again. It was a fumbling at the lock of the side door. She made one rush for the door just as it was opened cautiously. Sid and Will stood upon the threshold.

"Sid!" gasped Mrs. Tewksbury, as she sunk into the nearest chair, weeping hysterically.

"What on earth's the matter? What you up for?"

If Mrs. Tewksbury had been less overcome by her own feeling she might have noticed that her appearance before the young men was not in the nature of an agreeable surprise; also she might have noticed a certain thickness in Sid's speech not usually present, and certain other outward

and visible signs that pointed to at least one of the causes of their prolonged stay from home.

But she was too shaken by the terrible hour of fear she had just passed through and by the sudden relief of their arrival at the very moment when she had yielded entirely to her terrors for them, to be cognizant of anything much beyond the mere fact that they were here — safe.

"We mustn't wake your father," she gasped, brokenly, as soon as she could control her spasmodic weeping sufficiently to speak. "I was just going to call him to saddle the horses 'n' go after you. I've been most crazy. I thought surely you must be killed — at the roadside crossing, mebbe."

"All nonsense. Think I'm a baby?"

"Busted my tire, so we had to walk home. That's what kept us," said Will, pushing forward a damaged wheel as evidence.

"Well, you're back all right, thank the Lord!" Mrs. Ben, wiping her eyes, began to breathe great, relieved sighs that seemed almost to choke her while at the same time giving relief to her overwrought nerves. "You'd better get right upstairs before we wake up your pa. Sid, you kin show Will t' the spare room."

The young men, only too glad to escape, made as quick and quiet an exit as their condition permitted, congratulating each other, upon getting upstairs, that Mrs. Ben Tewksbury had been too upset to "notice anything."

"But this settles it. We'll have to cut out Thibeau's," said Sid.

"What! not see the girls any more?"

"Tina would make her folks let her go back with Jen to Millwell if we'd go there to see them. Maybe we could manage it."

"Oh, easy. We'll fix up some way; and Millwell is far enough off to be safer than this sort of thing."

Mrs. Tewksbury, again locking the doors, turned out the one dimly burning light. She sat still for some time, quite

exhausted; then she groped her way to the bedroom and slowly undressing in the dark, at last crept softly into bed beside the unconscious Ben. But it was not until long afterwards that her strained nerves grew quiet and she, too, sank into the beatitude of sleep.

CHAPTER XVII

LEAVING HOME

Two or three days later a letter came to Judge Wither-
spoon from Mr. Searles, to whom he had written in Ned's
behalf. The letter, after expressing regrets at being
obliged to disappoint the Justice, went on to say that upon
inquiry the engineering force had been found to be com-
pletely made up — even to the chainmen — a state of prepa-
ration in advance of what he (the writer) had anticipated
when replying first to the Judge's letter. The best he could
do was to promise that he would try to secure for the
Judge's young friend the first opening that occurred, as
chainman. If the young man cared to join the *laboring*
force so as to be upon the spot in the event of any changes,
it might facilitate his getting into a chainman's place. Pos-
sibly the young man would not care to start quite so low
down, but if he decided to do so he might come on at once
to Boston, come to his office and he would instruct him
when and where to join the expedition, and he might go
on at once. Otherwise he would inform the Judge of the
first vacancy as chainman. The letter finished with more
regrets that, for the Judge's sake, nothing better could be
done just now.

After reading the letter the Judge thought over the situ-
ation with much gravity, and also with more or less misgiv-
ing. He was almost tempted to destroy it, tell Ned that his
friend was unable to place him, and "wash his hands" of
the whole matter.

So long as Ned's ambitions remained in a state of theory
and positive action was suspended, the Judge had been ready
and willing to sympathize and to assist as far as was in
his power. But a condition now confronted him — the pos-

sibility of Ned's actually leaving home — that was big with possible consequences.

He realized now how largely instrumental he had been in bringing the condition about and he could not but feel a responsibility in whatever the outcome might be.

The position of "chainman" was of course the lowest round in the ladder of practical education in civil engineering and the pay was small, but the Judge knew that Ned would jump at the direct offer of such a position. Would he be willing to arrive at it through the menial work of the laborer — the cutting of trees, the shoveling of dirt, the digging of stones?

The Judge thought it more than likely that Ned would balk at such a prospect — not at the work, perhaps, but at the servile character of the position; still, there was the chance that he might take it — and if he *should*?

Again the Judge thought that the best thing for him to do was to burn the letter and have nothing further to do with encouraging Ned to leave his Uncle Daniel. That he would look upon Ned's going as a personal injury and resent it accordingly the Judge knew well, and that he himself would be held largely responsible for the youth's defection he felt sure. In this latter respect he feared that Ned's mother and sister would share Daniel's opinion. Then there was the shock to Mrs. Cutler and Priscilla of having Ned leave home to face the (to their imagination) devouring wolves of the outside world. For a time the Judge questioned the wisdom of breaking up the established order of things.

Too many young men were leaving the farms, anyway, he reflected. Ned had a *place* here; was secure in it by right of birth and force of circumstances. He would undoubtedly make an excellent farmer. Why help to send him out into the world to add one more to the army of strugglers among whom he might sink into that dread abyss — failure.

The Judge had almost persuaded himself that Ned had far better stay where he was and grow up in the station of

life to which it had apparently pleased God to call him, when the thought obtruded itself that it was by no means certain that he was in his present position by any edict of Divine Wisdom. Rather — was not his dissatisfaction, his strong bent toward civil engineering, his eager study under difficulties of whatever he could lay his hands on bearing upon this work, an inheritance from his father along the direct line of his own life endeavors? And the Judge admitted, again with misgivings, the father's failures. Yet might not this work be the place to which the hand of a higher power was pointing Ned's way? Might he not succeed in it beyond any one's expectations; even beyond his own?

The Judge recalled the glow in the young fellow's eyes when he had been talking of his desired profession. It was a glow as if a spirit flame gleamed up from some inward fire and lit his eyes with a strange radiance. The Judge remembered to have seen this peculiar light, on some rare occasions, in the eyes of men he had known. Some of these men had gone above the common line of success. One or two he remembered had gone under . . . they had lacked ballast . . . something . . . but one and all they had been enthusiasts; and an enthusiast in any calling had his battle half won. If the compass was well set, and the needle pointing true, the harbor was pretty sure, though the voyage might be rough.

That was what must remain to be proved about Ned. Who could tell? He might be a genius; perhaps some feat in engineering might one day stamp him as one of the great men of his country.

This thought clinched the argument and brought the Judge to his feet. "There'll be hell to pay," he said to himself, "but the boy's going to see this letter. Mebbe he'll turn out an A No. 1 article and mebbe he'll turn out a booby prize. But he's going to have this chance if he wants it."

As the Judge drove out to the farm in his speeding "gig," his feet braced, arms tense, head up, and horse flying, not

one of those who turned to gaze after him — and prophesy once more in regard to his ultimate fate in the matter of having his “neck bruk” — dreamed that that bold and dashing exterior hid many fearsome inner qualms.

“I don’t care a continental cuss what *Dan’l* says,” he was thinking, “but if Priscilla and her ma begin to cry I bet I’ll turn tail like a yeller dog ’n’ make for cover.”

As he dashed up in front of Daniel Tewksbury’s door there was no one in sight, but as he drew rein with a “whoa” of startling vociferousness (to keep up his courage) Daniel appeared in the doorway. Certain rattling of pans and crockery coming to his ears told the Justice that Priscilla and her mother were still busy with the supper dishes.

It was plain that Daniel was surprised to see the Judge. Since his refusal to go into court in behalf of either of the Tewksburys he had found himself treated coolly by both, especially by Daniel, who would have felt himself much more secure under the legal wing of Justice Witherspoon than of Lawyer Tuffts.

“Comin’ in?” Daniel asked the question in a tone which plainly conveyed to the Judge that he was not expected to come in and that there was no special desire on his part that he *should* come in.

“Well, I d’ know. Mebbe I’d better set out here for a spell ’n’ think it over.”

Just then Priscilla appeared at the window. Seeing who was there she retreated hastily. “Don’t let me scare ye away, Priscilla,” the Judge called good-naturedly after her. She came back to the window, blushing. “Bet you wouldn’t hev run away if it’d been a young, good-lookin’ chap out here,” at which Priscilla blushed more furiously and looked prettier than ever, the Judge thought.

“I didn’t want to interrupt you and Uncle Dan’l talkin’,” faltered Priscilla, apologetically.

“You wouldn’t have interrupted much,” the Judge replied with great good humor. “Your Uncle Dan’l’s been

sort o' tongue-tied with me lately. Ned anywhere around?"

"I don't know. I think he's at the barn." In some agitation Priscilla slipped out of sight again.

"I'll drive on out there," said the Judge. "I want to see Ned for a minute. May want to see *you* on my way back," he called back over his shoulder to Daniel.

At the barn he found Ned busy about his evening work. "Hey, Ned," he called to him, holding up the letter. "Got somethin' for you."

Ned came forward expectantly. "News?" he asked, eagerly.

The Judge handed him the letter. Ned read it first quickly, then again slowly, manifestly with disappointment.

The Judge studied Ned's face. Finally he said: "It ain't much like goin' to college, is it?"

Ned looked up appealingly at the Judge. "What do you think I ought to do, Judge?"

"Now see here, Ned, right here I'm going to shake my coat tails clear of any advice. You've got to decide this thing for yourself."

"And I've got to decide right now, too," said Ned, looking again at the letter, then over at his mother and Priscilla, who had come out to the front garden and were pottering among the flowers, "but it's going to be hard work breaking away."

"Separatin' a fly f'm a sheet o' stickin' paper 'ud be easier."

"If I don't go it may mean just staying on like this for — nobody knows how long."

"It ain't a bad place to stay," said the Judge, his eyes in turn wandering off to Mrs. Cutler and Priscilla twisting vines in the way they should go, pulling off the faded flowers, the withered leaves; giving the plants the touches of care that had brought them to such a riot of gorgeous blossoming. "It ain't sech a bad place to stay — if ye like it."

Ned, pondering the letter, seemed not to hear the Judge. "It'll be just cutting, and shoveling and digging — same as I've done all my life, but if I'm on the ground I've got a better chance of falling into something than if I stay way out here."

"That's horse sense, Ned."

Ned folded the letter, put it into the envelope and handed it to the Judge. "I'll go," he said quietly.

"All right," the Judge responded cheerily. "When are you going to throw the bomb into Uncle Dan'l?"

"Right away — now I've made up my mind the quicker it's over the better."

"Want me to stay by and help pick up the pieces?"

"*Will* you?"

"Squeeze in alongside here — we'll have the job done as quick as you could git a tooth pulled."

When they drew up to the porch Daniel was sitting there in his armchair.

Without waiting for an invitation the Judge alighted and Ned led his horse to the nearby hitching post.

Before a word had been spoken some subtle intelligence had conveyed to both Mrs. Cutler and Priscilla that unusual events were at hand. Unconsciously they stopped in their work over the flowers, anxiously watching and listening. Even Daniel, duller than the women in his sensibilities, roused a bit, with a feeling that something more than common was impending. The Judge said nothing. He leaned his big bulk against the corner post of the little front porch, waiting for Ned, who came up as soon as he had tied the horse. There was a moment of portentous silence as Ned stood at the foot of the steps in front of his uncle, seated on the landing in his old armchair. Then the young man looked up at him, speaking simply and directly to the point.

"Uncle Dan'l, I've got a chance to go where I can get work. I'll have to leave here right away."

Daniel started. An angry flush darkened his face. A quick glance showed the Justice the look of fear and grief

in Mrs. Cutler's eyes; he saw the sudden, tense hand-clasp of the two women.

"What's the matter?" he asked, his mouth grimly set. "Ain't ye got work enough here?"

"Yes, Uncle, there's work enough, but it isn't the kind I want."

"Oh, I s'pose ye want suthin ye kin do with kid gloves on."

"I want to earn some money of my own — I want to get on in the world if I can, that's all."

"Yes, I s'pose so! . . . after I've kep' ye fer years . . . 'n' kep' your mother 'n' your sister . . . kep' ye in a home 'n' kep' yer stomachs full, you're goin' to turn 'round 'n' leave me in the lurch, 'cause you 'want to git on in the world!'"

Ned choked down his own rising anger; his voice trembled but his tone was respectful. "I don't want *that* flung in my face as long as I live. That's *one reason* I'm going to try and make a living for myself; yes, and for mother and Priscilla, too, though I guess we've all done enough here to earn our board and clothes."

"If ye think ye've earned any more make out yer bill 'n' I'll pay it 'fore ye go!" Daniel roared in rage.

"Now see here, Dan'l." The Judge thought the chance had come to pour a few drops of oil on raging waters. "What's the use of being so obstinate? Ned's young and he wants a chance to try his mettle. For the Lord's sake, don't try to hitch him up for life to a plough if he don't *like* to plough! He's been studyin' like a major every spare minute he could get so's to start in doin' something he thinks he *will* like."

"Thought I told him I *didn't want* any o' that studyin' business," interrupted Daniel. "It's always puttin' fool notions into people's heads; but it seems *you* must a *kep'* on encouragin' 'n' aidin' 'n' abettin' 'im in it."

The Judge scratched his head a bit ruefully. "I own up to the corn, Dan'l. At first I done it just to pacify him — lent him books and helped him all I could — thought

maybe it was just a notion he'd git over; but he's stuck to his purpose, by Jim! tighter'n a burr to a dog's tail. He's got a chance now to go along with an engineering outfit and make a little money while he's learnin' the business. You can get some one easy enough to do his work 'round here 'n' it's my opinion that you're a darn unreasonable old crank if you don't give your consent to his goin'."

"It's easy fer you to talk — ye ain't feelin' the sting of his ingratitude. He's goin' whether I give my consent er not, but I ain't goin' to try and keep him. He kin go fer all o' me! He kin take his belongin's 'n' clear out 'n' stay out, 'n' if he finds himself starvin' he needn't come back here whinin' fer victuals."

"You've got a good crop o' stuns on the farm — I s'pose a few of them 'ud be the best hand-out he could look fer. Well, Ned," turning to that agitated young man, with a twinkle in his eye, "got to make your choice now. Possible starvation if ye go, sure if ye come back, 'n' the stalled corned pork barrel with trimmin's if ye stay."

Mrs. Cutler was weeping silently. Priscilla's eyes were misty, but she held the tears back — she must try to sustain the timid little woman at her side, though her own heart was filled with painful foreboding.

"You haven't thought how Ma'd feel, have ye, Ned?" Priscilla's voice was wistfully appealing. The Judge suffered an internal collapse.

Ned hung his head to hide the wet of his eyes. "Ma knows," he said with quivering lips; "Ma knows all about things. She ain't going to want me to stay here."

Mrs. Cutler pressed forward, love and the awful fear of separation giving her courage to speak out before Daniel's very face. "Ye won't go right away — ye won't go fer a week er two, will ye, Ned?"

"He'll go now!" Daniel was standing now, white and unrelenting. "Pack up yer traps — the sooner yer gone the quicker ye'll begin to 'git on in the world!'"

"Set here, Ma." Priscilla helped her mother, who was trembling to the verge of falling, to the step of the

little porch where she sank, weak and shaking, the slow tears rolling down her withered cheeks.

"I'll help Ned to pack," said Priscilla, running after him into the house and up to his room.

Not a word was spoken between the three left outside upon the porch. Toward Daniel the Justice felt such a raging indignation that he could not trust to the propriety of his language if he allowed himself to speak, and to Mrs. Cutler he was *afraid* to say anything — perhaps she blamed him for Ned's going.

So there was tense, unbroken silence.

It took not many moments for the gathering together of Ned's few belongings. When he came down, bringing a big old-fashioned carpet bag, once carried by his father, Mrs. Cutler's tears flowed more bitterly. For the second time the very life of her life was going out.

Priscilla was bravely forcing a smile to her trembling lips. The Judge untied his horse and climbed into the rig.

"Good-bye, Uncle Dan'l;" said Ned. "Don't think I'm not caring about all you've done for us; but I've just got to be a civil engineer if I *can*. Good-bye, Priscilla," holding her hand tight and kissing her cheek. "Good-bye, mother" — she rose to kiss him — "oh, mother!" Suddenly the reserve of New England training forsook him. With a dry sob he threw his arms around her neck and they wept together. "Mother, you know I've got to try."

"Yes, Ned, I s'pose you've got to try."

He tossed his carpet bag to the Judge, clambering up beside him on the narrow seat.

Priscilla, at the wagon wheel, reached for a last hand-clasp. The Justice leaned over. "Tell your Ma to cheer up," he whispered. "I'll see that Ned gits a few snow balls t' eat." He clicked to the horse and they were off in a small whirlwind of dust.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE JUDGE LENDS A HAND

NED was silent as he and the Justice whirled along the road toward the Putnam House. A sharp and agonizing pain tore at his heart — such a new and terrible pain he was unable to voice it to the Judge. He wondered how he was going to live and bear it. For a while night seemed to him to have suddenly descended. He could not see the fields, the trees, the road upon which they were spinning along, even the horse in front of them; all were shut from his sight by an impenetrable blackness which fell like a pall between him and all the outside world. His attachment for his mother and his sister Priscilla was a very strong one. He had never been away from them even for one night, before, and this violent breaking of the home ties was something he had never contemplated. Just before reaching the hotel he managed to say to the Judge:

“I never thought I’d have to go all of a heap, like this — I always thought if I went at all there’d be time to talk it over — and everybody’d get used to it. I didn’t ever think Uncle Dan’d just turn me out like this!”

To which the Judge found time from looking after his horse to answer — “Always want to look for things to happen the way ye *don’t* expect ’em; they always have a darned extrordinary way of turnin’ out to suit themselves. You can’t tell which way of the fence they’re going to jump.”

When they neared the hotel — “We’ll drive ’round and go in the back way,” he said. “If Miss Fitch’s tabby cat sees you gittin’ out with this here bag the town’ll have you goin’ to jail er Jericho before they say their prayers to-night.”

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At the rear of the hotel they alighted and slipped quietly in the back door. The Judge sent Ned at once to his own room. "I'll see the landlord," he said; "make yourself at home till I come." As Ned went down the hall, the Judge, looking after him, thought, "D'know but it's mean o' me not to give him my satchel—but the' ain't no use makin' things too easy—p'raps carryin' that carpet bag'll be good discipline fer 'im."

Going into what served at once as office, bar, and general lounging room, "Joel, I've got Ned Cutler here," he said to the landlord. "We've got a little business to talk over. Can you fix him up with a room? He'll have to stay all night."

"Guess the' won't be no trouble 'bout beddin' 'im, Jedge, if it's goin' to 'commodate ye enny?'"

"I'd like to have an extry 'early breakfast, too," continued the Judge, "and I want my hoss hitched so we kin start soon's we're through eatin'."

"B'lieve in gettin' folks home bright 'n' early—an' on a full stummick? All right, Jedge, I'll see you're 'commodated."

"Yes, hev some coffee 'n' ham 'n' eggs ready 'n' the hoss hitched 'bout four o'clock—the earlier we git away the better."

"Must be expectin' to ketch a good big fat worm t' git ye up at that time o' mornin', Jedge."

"Not much, Joel, I'm the worm this time. I'm tryin' to skip 'fore the birds 'r' up so's to keep f'm bein' picked to pieces."

"Ye will hev your joke, Jedge. All right, four o'clock, if ye say so—alwus ready to 'commodate you, Jestice Withersp'n."

When the Judge reached his room he found Ned sitting with a book in his hand making a heroic attempt to seem interested; but before he had time to force a smile the Judge had caught an expression of forlorn misery in his face.

"Downhearted?" queried the Judge.

Ned tried to smile. "I don't feel so very chipper," he admitted.

"Sorry? — want to turn back?"

"No, Judge. What makes you ask me that? I've been acting a little soft, I guess — but you see — you see — I've never been away from Ma and Priscilla before . . . and I . . . but I'll pull up all right — and I've split too much cord-wood and dug too many potatoes to be afraid of clearing away timber and shoveling road beds." He finished with a laugh which, if a bit forced, was a healthy and encouraging sign, so the Judge thought.

"Well," he said, "I don't know as I'd think any better of you if you could pull up stakes and quit your folks without bein' just a little cast down; but it's a good thing on the other hand not to be *so* cast down that it takes the fight out of you. I guess, Ned, you'll make a pretty good *start*, anyway, and ther' ain't no livin' bein' can tell whether you'll beat comin' in under the wire or whether you'll be one of the get-lefts at the post."

The Judge stopped to light a fresh cigar before continuing: "*One* thing I like. Ye haven't been too choice about how ye was goin' to make a beginnin'." Here the Justice fell into reverie, gazing past Ned with a far-away look in his eyes, puffing big clouds of smoke into space. After a moment he went on: "I 'member how I fust broke into the law business . . . It was in old Squire Colese's office in North Brookfield . . . I got a job sweepin' out the office mornin's 'n' makin' the fire 'n' cleanin' the cuspidor." After another moment of thought the Judge resumed: "And now, Ned, it 'ud be against all the laws o' custom if I let ye go without givin' ye what *somebody* always feels it's his duty to give a young man when he goes out into the world — *advice*. You're beginnin' below even the first round of the ladder, but always hev yer spy-glass handy 'n' keep sightin' fer the top. You keep a stiff upper lip; don't take a back-down for anyone. Be civil to everybody, and obligin', but not *over-obligin'*. Work your level best *at whatever* you're doin', and don't stop till

it's done. Don't keep watchin' the clock fer quittin' time. *And*, whatever ye go *without*, don't go *into* debt. Don't borrow money. If yer shoes git thin on the bottom put paper in the soles till ye've earned a new pair. You'll find the paper a mighty sight warmer 'n' more comf'table 'n' bein' in debt."

"That's pretty good advice, I know, and I'll try to follow it the best I can."

"Good intentions go a long way. If ye try ye'll come nearer 'n' if ye don't try, *that's* sure. I've made arrangements for us to leave here about four o'clock in the mornin'." The Judge went on: "I want to git ye away before any one can pester us with a lot o' dum-fool questions, and I tell ye, ye've pretty near got to git up before you go to bed if you want to git ahead of the folks round here. I'll drive you over to Union Junction and you can ketch onto the first train goin' to Boston that stops there."

"It's pretty tough on you though," said Ned. "I think I'd better walk to the Junction. I'll get an early start and take my time, and more than likely I'll catch on to a ride part of the way."

"Nonsense! I'm glad to do it. And here—here's a twenty-dollar bill—put it in your pocket; you may need it 'n' you can pay me back when your ship comes in."

"What about your advice, Judge," said Ned, laughing a little, "and the soles of my shoes are pretty good yet."

"Oh, pshaw, Ned, this is *different*; you're just startin' out now, and I feel as if I was a little bit responsible for your goin'; put it in your pocket now and think no more about it."

"I don't need it, Judge, honest, I don't. I've got enough to pay my fare to Boston and keep me till I get my first week's pay."

"Take it; ye don't know what ye may need. Come; I won't like it if ye don't. There's more where that comes from and I want you to let me know if ye git in any trouble. I want you to feel that you've got a friend in me if ye need one."

Thus urged, Ned had taken the money and now, as the Judge held out his hand he grasped it and tried to express his gratitude.

"Tut, tut! I don't want any thanks; just you git in 'n' show them tarnal Tewksb'rys — that's all! Now, get to bed, boy; we've got to be up by four o'clock, bear that in mind. We'll go down and find out from Joel where you're going to sleep."

"Judge," . . . Ned stopped him, speaking hesitatingly. "I thought — that is — I told Emily once I wouldn't go away without seeing her —"

"Well, it's too late now; I don't see how it could be managed. Besides, I ain't much on tips when Cupid's doin' the runnin', but it seems to me you'd best keep off the turf entirely. You'd better tend strictly to business and not try to stir in any other mixture — fer a while anyway. I'll tell Emily all about it."

"All right, Judge," Ned replied, after an instant's silence; "whatever you say goes with me."

"There's an awful lot of *Cutler* in him," was the Judge's inward comment on Ned's rather remarkable docility and deference to his wishes. "I hope the' ain't *too darn much* Cutler," was his further reflection after they had separated for the night.

But in trying to account for Ned's readiness to acquiesce — to give up his wishes to others — the Judge was largely ignorant of his life-long experience. He had always been yielding to a superior will. First it had been Mrs. Ben Tewksbury and Sid; after that his Uncle Daniel. Always, through his mother's timid fears of offending, Ned had given up when there had been any clash of wills. Only in this one thing, the choice of his life work, had he ever stuck to his own wish, against opposition. If he had known, the Judge might have been more dubious than ever of Ned's success in the struggle before him.

If Miss Fitch had been two minutes later stepping out to her front gate, she would have missed the sight of the

Judge's secret expedition, which consisted of his light road-wagon, his fast horse with the dubious past, himself, Ned, and the old carpet bag, as it whirled around the corner on its way toward Union Junction.

"But," said Mr. Tibbitts, in the midst of a small crowd gathered at his store later, "Joel Putn'm said the Judge was goin' to drive Ned out home."

"They was goin' right away f'm Dan'l Tewksb'ry's d'rection, 'n' turned Heminway's Corner, jest where everybody turns when their goin' to git the train at the crossin', 'n' besides Ned hed the carpet bag, 'n' if they *hed* gone to Dan'l Tewksb'ry's, *where's* Jedge Withersp'n? He's hed time to git *there* 'n' back forty times."

Which certainly sustained Miss Fitch's conclusions, and long before the Judge returned it was pretty well noised about the Corners that he had surreptitiously, as it were, spirited Ned Cutler away to Union Junction, where he could have gone for one purpose only—to take a train going somewhere.

"*Where?*" "*what fer?*" and "*why?*" were interrogations flying thickly about.

At the dinner table that noon Mr. Peabody casually remarked: "I hear that Ned Cutler has left Dan'l Tewksbury's—left the *Corners*, in fact."

Emily's fork fell with a clatter upon her plate. In one way it was a welcome sound to both Mr. and Mrs. Peabody, for, while it told of an undesirable interest in Ned, it assured her parents of Emily's ignorance of the young man's movements.

"Where's he gone?—what for?" queried Mrs. Peabody.

"No one seems to know. It almost looks as if he was *sneaking* away. Judge Witherspoon drove him in from the farm all in a hurry last evening. He wasn't seen around the hotel at all, and about four o'clock this morning, Witherspoon hurried off with him toward Union Junction—of course, everyone *supposes*, to catch a train there. No

one seems to know anything of the reasons for his going. *Sid* hasn't heard such a possibility even mentioned."

"I do hope," said Mrs. Peabody, "he hasn't done anything to bring more trouble, or maybe disgrace, on his poor mother." And with inward satisfaction she reflected, "What a way things have of settling themselves. There's no need now of sending Emily to Litchfield."

CHAPTER XIX

SEEKING FORTUNE

IN the whole course of his life Ned had been but three or four times in Boston. These rare visits had been paid on special holidays. Fourth of July, Decoration Day, Washington's Birthday; always there had been a little crowd from the Corners making the excursion together. The impression left upon his mind had always been one of pleasurable bustle and excitement, of gayety and brightness.

As he found his way now from the station up into the midst of the city he wondered at the deadness with which it smote him. The crowd and the bustle were there, but the life seemed to have gone. He felt immeasurably alone. Everyone went hither and thither about his own business. No one noticed him save for an occasional backward glance of amusement — unseen by Ned — at the antiquated carpet bag. Somehow, his mother, Priscilla, Emily, the most deserted nook of his Uncle Daniel's farm seemed — oh, so much nearer, so much fuller of life and gayety than this street he stood upon with all its hurrying crowd; but a sense of the necessity for action braced him a little and urged him on against the tide of homesickness that was rushing over him. The first thing for him to do, was to see Mr. James E. Searles, present the letter he had brought from Judge Witherspoon, and find out when and where he was to begin work. There was to be no going back for him, Ned felt. He was going out to new scenes, new people, new endeavors. Going out to chop, to dig, to hew and to carry — to begin at the very root, as it were, of his chosen work, of which in dreams he had seen only the fruitage, the built bridges.

He quickened his steps and by making a few inquiries, soon found his way to Mr. Searles' offices.

When he went in, rather diffidently, he found several people at work. A young woman was engaged at a typewriter. One young man was busy drawing what seemed to Ned to be a map or chart; another young man, just then seeming not very busy himself, was leaning over the desk watching its progress. As Ned and his carpet bag came in sight this young man gave a short and very expressive, though subdued whistle, and remarked to the draughtsman, "twig!" Thereupon the other looked up, and they both laughed.

Nothing of this escaped Ned's notice. He felt that he was an object of ridicule and a hot flush of resentment rose to his cheek; but he managed to ask, quietly, as the young man came forward with an air of supercilious inquiry, "Is Mr. Searles in?"

"Not in," said the young man pertly.

"When will he be in?" Ned persisted.

"Can't say," the young fellow replied with flippancy and indifference.

"I want to see him." Ned's tone was anxious.

The young man who was drawing the map rose from his desk. "Mr. Searles has gone home," he said; "won't be here again until to-morrow morning."

"Thank you, sir," Ned answered gratefully. "I'll come back in the morning."

Once more upon the street, Ned fell to walking on and on aimlessly. His mind was too filled with anxious thoughts to permit of any pleasure in roaming about. After wandering about disconsolately for some time, a thought suddenly darted from Ned's subconsciousness into full activity.

Why should he wait until to-morrow to see Mr. Searles? Why not go to his house and try to see him this afternoon? There was a drug store on a nearby corner, and Ned went in to ask for information.

"Can you tell me where Mr. Searles lives?"

"Searles?" echoed the pallid-looking clerk. "*What Searles?*"

"Mr. James E. Searles. He has lots to do with street railroads and trolleys."

"Oh, *that* Searles. He's one of the big guns. Lives over in Back Bay somewheres; don't know the street and number; you'll find it in the directory over there," nodding in the direction of a much-thumbed volume lying on the end of the counter near the door.

Armed with Mr. Searles' address, and directions from the clerk as to the quickest and easiest way of getting there, Ned set forth once more and with a few minor mishaps in the way of boarding the wrong cars and being obliged to retrace his steps, he at last reached his destination. Arrived in front of the house, he was seized with doubts as to the wisdom of his coming. It was an imposing-looking mansion and Ned hesitated before ascending the great stone steps and ringing the bell at the big plate-glass and fancy iron-grilled door.

After a moment's uneasy waiting the door was opened by a man. He seemed to Ned to be very stiff and important in his manner. "Are you Mr. Searles?" asked Ned.

The man stared. "Mr. Searles is engaged," he answered, "He can't see anyone."

"I—I have a letter," faltered Ned. He set his carpet bag down upon the steps and began to open it.

"If it's begging or anything to sell there's no use bothering us." The man was preparing to shut the door.

Ned straightened himself up. "It's neither one, and I'll be obliged to you if you'll take the letter to Mr. Searles."

After an instant's hesitation the man took the letter and disappeared, shutting the door in Ned's face.

After what seemed a long time to Ned, in which he began to think that he was entirely forgotten, the door reopened.

"Will you step inside?" said the man; and Ned entered into such luxury of decorations and furnishings as he had

never even dreamed of. He began to feel sure that he had made a mistake in intruding himself and his painfully small claims upon a man of such importance as Mr. Searles must be. He heard again the laughter of the clerks in Mr. Searles' office, and heard again that contemptuously amused "twig." If a mere clerk of Mr. Searles treated him with so much scorn, what might he expect from the owner of all this magnificence? Suddenly a slender man of middle age, of middle height, and of extremely quiet manner, stood before him with the Judge's letter open in his hand.

"You are the young man Judge Witherspoon writes me about?"

"Yes, sir; I went to your office, but you weren't there. I was anxious about the work. I wanted to see you as soon as I could, so I came here. I—I hope you don't mind."

Mr. Searles' eyes were fixed keenly on Ned's face. It seemed to Ned that he was looking through him to the wall back of him.

"Not at all," answered Mr. Searles, courteously; "though I'm afraid I have no very encouraging news for you. There seems to be nothing, just now, better than the laborers' jobs."

"I didn't really expect anything better *now*, but I wanted to be sure of getting *that much*; and I'd like a chainman's place the first chance there is—if you'll give it to me."

Again Mr. Searles fixed Ned with a piercing, yet not unkindly glance.

"Call at my office to-morrow morning at ten o'clock," he said, "and I'll see what can be done for you. Good afternoon."

"Thank you, sir. Good afternoon."

Thus, summarily, though politely dismissed, Ned left Mr. Searles' splendid house somewhat comforted, if not elated by the interview.

He had at least accomplished his purpose. He had done what he could; and in imagination he heard the Judge's

voice saying, "Didn't let any grass grow under yer feet, did ye?"

In truth, though Ned knew it not, he had struck an approving chord in the mind of Mr. Searles. "Persistent, and not afraid of tackling hard work to get what he's after. I'll keep him in mind." He folded the Judge's letter carefully and put it in the inner breast pocket of his coat.

It was between five and six o'clock when Ned turned his face once more toward the business part of the town to hunt up a suitable lodging place for the night. On and on he wandered, enjoying the air and the exercise, out of and beyond the aristocratic section inhabited by Mr. Searles into the region of crowded traffic and humbler homes.

Suddenly he was aware that something was happening. Not far from him, in the direction in which he was going, a crowd was surging. He heard shouts and the sound of running. There was a wild scattering of people, then he saw, tearing toward him, a big runaway horse. The wagon, with its single occupant, a dark, heavy-set man, was swaying from side to side. He clung desperately to the reins, but the frightened animal had the bit in his teeth and was beyond control. The crowd following, shouting in excitement, only added to the horse's fright.

To Ned, the on-coming terror was just a runaway horse, to be stopped if possible. Fear of the animal he did not know; he had been friends with horses since his infancy. He dropped his carpet bag. As the horse neared him, Ned darted forward and gathering all his strong sinews and lean, hardened muscles for the effort, sprang for the headstall—caught it—clutching it with a grip of iron—swinging his weight from the horse's head. Twice he sank to the ground, was dragged along, and was lifted up again, the breathless, terrified on-lookers expecting to see him fall and be trampled under the flying hoofs. Then the horse stood still, trembling in every limb, listening to Ned's soothing voice. A policeman, hurrying to the scene, relieved him of the horse. The driver, white but composed, came to

Ned, who was the circle of an admiring crowd. "I want to know your name," he said. "You shall be well rewarded for this."

"I ain't afraid of horses," said Ned, much embarrassed by so much attention. "I don't want any reward for catching him; it didn't amount to shucks."

Just then a newspaper reporter came up and the driver of the horse turning to him to give an account of the runaway Ned slipped away through the crowd to get his carpet bag and make his escape. When he reached the spot where he had dropped it, it was gone.

"What ye lookin' fer, mister?" asked a small boy on the edge of the crowd.

"My bag — my satchel —"

"Was it made out'n a piece o' carpet? I seen a feller runnin' up the street with one — up that way."

"Swiped!" put in a second urchin in accents of profound conviction.

"Well, any one dat ud do dat ud steal frum 'is gran'-mudder!" went on the first gamin, who had carefully pointed Ned in the wrong direction and who afterward shared in the plunder.

But Ned waited for no more expressions of righteous indignation. He was sprinting up the street in the direction the small boy had pointed out. When the reporter, the man who had been run away with and the admiring crowd turned about to speak with Ned, the small boy pointed to him as he vanished round a corner in the distance.

But a policeman being near, the small boy forbore to make any mention of the theft of the carpet bag.

Needless to say, Ned did not overtake his bag. It had vanished into the limbo of the unknown and with it all his store of worldly goods. He went through his pockets anxiously.

He had just sixty-three cents. What could he do? He might go back and try to find the man who had offered to reward him for stopping his runaway horse, but he thought it would make him feel very foolish to take money

for doing such a thing as that. Or he might return to Mr. Searles' house and ask for some assistance, explaining his ill luck. He concluded that this would be too much of an intrusion upon that gentleman who, although he had treated him with perfect courtesy, had not shown any warmth of interest that Ned felt would justify him in appealing for help. A certain fear of ridicule also put a seal upon Ned's lips. People would think he must be pretty "green," he thought, to let any one run off with his satchel like that.

Ned decided that he could get along until the next day, when Mr. Searles would probably set him at work, on his sixty-three cents. "That'll be more than enough to buy supper and breakfast," he thought, "and it's so warm and pleasant I can sleep around 'most anywhere."

That night, after a frugal supper, Ned sought the Common. He was tired and he was glad to sit upon one of the benches and rest. Gradually, as the hour grew later, people ceased to come and go. At last Ned was alone. The bench was in a quiet, shadowed corner. He stretched himself upon it and slept.

It was about half past three when he awoke. He was used to early rising and he felt none the worse for "roughing" it, except the generally uncomfortable rumpliness of his clothing. His hair was the worse for the slats of the park bench and his only comb had departed with his carpet bag. Smoothing it as well as he could with his fingers, brushing his clothes with his hands and shaking himself into some appearance of tidiness, he strolled out of the park and along the street, wondering how he should kill the time until his appointment at Mr. Searles' office at ten o'clock.

After awhile the town began to stir. People in plenty were on their way to work. The smaller shops began to open. Ned was very glad. He was tired of walking and he began to feel the need of breakfast.

After lingering as long as he thought he decently could

over a cup of coffee and some rolls, he sought a stationer's where he bought two envelopes and three sheets of paper, paying for them five cents out of his remaining capital of thirty-three; and seeking the post office, he stood at a shelf fixed against the side of the wall where, by the providence of the government, he found a bottle with a little ink on the bottom and a choice between two pens that had both seen better days. But Ned was not disposed to find fault—he was only too happy to find something he needed for which he did not have to pay—so standing at the shelf he wrote a long and cheerful letter to Priscilla, telling her of his interview with Mr. Searles, the magnificence of his home, and that he was now about to see him again for definite information. His letter to the Judge was shorter, telling the same things but in a more businesslike way. There was no mention of the runaway nor the theft of his bag. The letters completed and mailed, after spending four more cents for stamps, Ned left the post office for Mr. Searles' place of business with just twenty-four cents in cash and a large fund of hope to draw upon.

The same clerks were in Mr. Searles' office as had been there the day before and there were several men waiting about. Presumably they were there to see Mr. Searles, as was Ned. After he had stood by the door for a second or two, uncertain what to do, the facetious youth of the previous day came up with a beautiful expression of never having seen him before.

"I came to see Mr. Searles. He told me to be here at ten o'clock."

"Oh, all right; what name?"

"Edward Cutler."

"Sit down; Mr. Searles is busy just now."

Ned sat down. In the course of an hour or so, when those who were waiting there before him had gone into the inner room, came out again and made their disappearance through the entrance door, it was his turn to be ushered into the private room of the man who was to Ned as the arbiter of his destiny.

"Good morning," said Mr. Searles as Ned came before him. He was the same cool, quiet, civil, yet coldly distant man as when Ned had braved him in the seclusion of his luxurious home.

"Good morning, sir," was all Ned ventured in words, though his eager face spoke eloquently of his hopes.

Mr. Searles went to the point without preamble. "There has been a slight hitch in our arrangements and work will not begin for two weeks."

Ned's face was equally eloquent now of disappointment, indeed, of alarm.

Mr. Searles, not being able to see the twenty-four cents in Ned's pocket and know that it was his sole capital, interpreted the look not quite correctly and hastened to add: "There will be a place held for you; you can depend on that. Call here two weeks from to-day at nine o'clock. I'll see that you're taken care of."

"Thank you, sir, I'll be here." He hesitated a second, then decided that he had better not trouble Mr. Searles with any mention of his necessities. "Good morning," he said, and got himself out as quickly as possible. On reaching the street he stood still for a moment, thinking. Then half aloud: "If I can't earn my salt in this town for two weeks, I guess I ain't worth it."

Succeeding days brought so much discouragement and so many unpleasant experiences that Ned was more than once obliged to fortify himself with the Judge's advice, "Keep a stiff upper lip." In fact, said unyielding lip seemed to be for a time his one and only asset.

Ned grew very grateful for the bench on the Common; it came to assume an almost homey aspect. Some odd chores — holding a man's horse for a few minutes; helping another move some heavy boxes — earned him a few nickels. He did not starve and he did not feel himself very much abused; he was looking ahead to other things.

The lack of regular occupation was the hardest thing for him to endure — the sense of having no place in the scheme of things — the endless walking, searching, asking

for something to do, and the seemingly endless futility of it. Ned began to think that either there was no work to be done in Boston or that he was the only one in the whole city who was not supplied with it. But on the morning of the fifth day his now almost hopeless wanderings took him past a livery stable on a side street. A rudely lettered placard hung on the door, "Man Wanted."

After a few minutes' talk with the owner of the place Ned was the possessor of the "job" at three dollars per week and sleep in the stable.

That afternoon he heard one of the men approach the proprietor with, "Say, boss, gimme a plunk on account, will you?" to which the "boss" responded without demur. Late in the day Ned gained courage to make a like request, though he felt it would be useless to try to imitate either the vernacular or the intimate assurance of the older employee.

"I'd like to get a half dollar, if you don't mind giving it to me." Without remark, the good-natured "boss" handed it over to him.

That night Ned ate once more. As he lay upon the cot within the quiet stable, listening to the horses peacefully munching their hay, he was happy. He had "stuck it out" without calling upon any one for assistance and he was tasting the sweets of hard-earned independence.

CHAPTER XX

THE JUDGE ACTS AS PROXY

"OLD man" Goslin was holding forth to Elnathan Tibbitts in his store. By this time Mr. Goslin's courtship of Mrs. Lunn and the troubled course of his love, owing to the violent opposition of his sons and daughters, was freely talked about at the Corners. No one talked more freely than Mr. Goslin himself.

"Ever ben sorry ye ain't got no childern, Elnathan? No, don't s'pose ye hev; childern's a consid'able trouble f'm fust to last, ain't they? Yes — jesso — jesso," nodding his head in a slow, regular, mechanical accompaniment to his words, as was his continual habit.

Mr. Tibbitts was assorting the daily mail. He glanced at Mr. Goslin with his crossed eyes over the top of the envelope, which he was holding close to the end of his nose in order to read the address. "Another letter fer Mis' Peabody! She got one day 'fore yistiddy. 'F ev'ry one 'round here got ez much mail as Mis' Peabody we'd hev t' eenlarge the post offis."

"Whut ye think them childern o' mine sais? Sais they'll turn me out o' house 'n' hum if I marry Widda Lunn. Whut ye think I tells 'em? He-he-he; I tells 'em they'll hev t' git another boy to boss. Pretty sma't o' me, wan't it, Tibbitts? Yes — jesso — jesso." Mr. Goslin's head kept on nodding after he had done speaking until it gradually stopped of its own lessening momentum.

"Here's a letter to Ben Tewksb'ry f'm them 'tarneys o' his'n over to Litchfield. Ben allus swells up consider'ble after gittin' one o' them."

"By gum, Elnathan! air them childern goin' t' bring my gray hairs in sorrer to the grave? Not s' long's I got a

leg to stan' on, no siree! Pretty spunky I be when I'm teched; ye noticed that, Tibbitts? Yes — jesso — jesso."

"Two fer Jestice Withersp'n. Wonder now who they kin be frum? Both of 'em f'm Boston. Good mornin', Em'ly; here's another letter fer yer ma."

"Thank you, Mr. Tibbitts, and when you're through distributing the mail I want some groceries. Good morning, Mr. Goslin."

"Mornin', Em'ly; nice mornin'. Kind a-coolish fer this time o' year, ain't it? Yes — jesso — jesso."

"I guess I kin wait on ye now, Emily. Yes, them letters fer the Judge f'm Boston is the last in the bag. Putty heavy mail this mornin'."

Just then the Judge himself came in. He had been seeking an opportunity of speaking with Emily alone. None had offered since Ned's going and it was now nine days since he had watched him away on the train from the platform at Union Junction.

"Two letters fer ye, Jedge," said Mr. Tibbitts, handing them to the Justice, as he came forward to wait on Emily.

"How d'ye do, Emily; ain't seen you for quite a spell; that is, near enough to speak to."

Emily smiled but the Judge thought her eyes wore an anxious look. "That's because you've kept so far away from me, Judge," she answered.

"Eggs, did you say, Emily? I got some nice fresh ones; Dan'l Tewksb'ry brought 'em in yistiddy." Then turning to the Judge: "S'pose you know where Ned Cutler is 'n' what he's up to, Jedge?" Mr. Tibbitts had one eye on the letters in the Judge's hand and the other on the package he was doing up for Emily. "The' ain't anybody kin git a word out o' *Dan'l*."

"Ned Cutler quit Dan'l fer good, ain't he?" piped up "Old man" Goslin, saving the Judge from making any sort of a reply to Mr. Tibbitts. "Done suthin' he no business to, eh? Putty nigh got into jail? Yes, jesso, jesso. Ain't childern jest born t' make ther folks mis'able? If 'tain't one thing it's t'other. Yes — jesso — jesso."

The Judge continued to linger, looking over his letters, one of which was from Ned, until Emily had nearly completed her purchases, when he took himself off, stopping outside the door as if for a casual look up and down the village street. When Emily appeared with her bundles he gave a little well-assumed start as if her coming had broken in upon some far-away train of thought and spoke up very loud for the benefit of Mr. Tibbitts.

"Why, Emily, you're loaded at both sides like a pack mule; must be goin' to do consid'able eatin' over to your house. Here, give me that bucket and some o' them packages."

"Nonsense, Judge," said Emily, laughing; "you must think I'm like a city girl that can't carry home a package of pins."

"Well, just as well let me have 'em," the Judge was removing the parcels and tin pail from Emily's embrace; "I'm goin' right by your house anyway."

Elnathan Tibbitts, watching them as they crossed the street, gave vent to his view of the situation.

"By jingo! the older they git the younger they like 'em!"

"Jedge gittin' soft in the upper story? Looks that way, eh? carryin' passels fer the gals? Yes — jesso — jesso," nodded Mr. Goslin.

"By Jim! — 'n' right out in plain sight, too!"

"I've been tryin' to see you alone," the Justice was saying, "but I couldn't seem to git a chance. Ned —"

"Ned!" Emily interrupted. Her voice trembled with hurt feeling mixed with resentment and quick tears dimmed her eyes. "It was unkind of him — it was *mean* of him to go away without telling me one word about it!"

"That's where you're wrong and it was all my doings that he didn't."

"Your doings?"

"Yes; only for me I guess he would have marched right over to your front gate and whistled for you to come out; then you'd a-fell on each other's neck cryin' over your 'good-

byes 'n' the story would a-been all over the Corners by next mornin'."

"Nonsense!" Emily smiled through her tears.

"No *non*-sense — *horse* sense — and you know it, Emily."

"Why did Ned go away in such a hurry? Where is he? What is he doing?"

"Well, as quick as I can answer three things at once: In a nutshell, he's in Boston now; he's gone away to get work, and he went in a hurry because his Uncle Dan'l turned his picture to the wall *quick* when he found out that Ned was goin' to branch out for himself."

"People have been saying — you heard Mr. Goslin just now in the store — that Ned has done something wrong or he wouldn't have left in such a hurry."

"People say mor'n their prayers even if they do spend consid'able time in the amen corner."

"I didn't believe it; but I *thought* he ought to have said good-bye to *me*."

"He wanted to; but I showed him it was more sensible to let me say it for him. Ned's started out to try and learn to be a civil engineer by workin' with an engineering corps. Now I've told you how it is; just don't keep harpin' on Ned in your mind. It's unfortunate anyway that you two —"

"Now, Judge, *please don't!* I thought you were Ned's friend, and my friend —"

"So I am — so I am; here — here we are at your gate; take your bundles; but that don't need to make me blind. It 'ud be a darn sight better if that pesterin' Cupid had shied ye both off on a trail where there was a little more ready money layin' round loose."

"Oh, money! money! always money! What does money amount to anyhow!" cried Emily with youthful intolerance of the prudent and practical.

The Judge assented. "It don't amount to shucks so long's you've got enough of it handy to pay the bills. Now good-bye, Emily; if we stand here any longer El Tibbitts — see him peekin' out the window at us? — 'll hev *us* engaged. I'll slip you a word now and then about Ned —

when there's anything doing — and, say, Emmy, keep whatever I tell ye under your vest."

"You may be sure I will."

"Ned's undertaken a big job and the less said about it the better — till he begins to see his way clear o' the underbrush."

"Oh, Judge, he surely *will* succeed. Don't you think so?"

"Well, folks 'round here says the's too much turnip for the amount o' horse reddish in Ned; but ye can't often pick the winner at the first start f'm the post and I'm backin' Ned fer a *small* stake. Now you go in 'n' help your Ma with her baking and keep your mind off Ned,— it'll be the best thing for ye."

Which good and sensible advice it is needless to say Emily completely disregarded, so far as not thinking about Ned was concerned. She went about her tasks humming little snatches of tunes as she had not done since Ned went away.

Her mother, noticing this, said nothing. Ned had been a tabooed subject between them though Mrs. Peabody had not failed to observe a certain flagging in Emily's spirits after his departure from the Corners. Hearing the girl singing, she mentally congratulated herself that Emily's had been but a childish fancy, already being cured by Ned's absence.

The summer wore along.

Emily's visit to her aunt had been given up, the necessity for it having removed himself, providentially, from the Corners, and in every way that could be devised Mrs. Peabody was trying to bring about the engagement, which seemed to her so desirable, between her daughter and Sid. Not that she directly pressed the matter upon Emily — in fact, since the evening when she had first broached the subject with such disquieting results, she had not openly returned to it, but she had taken pains to bring Emily and Sid much together. She frequently had Sid to take tea

with them and little parties of young folks had been invited for pleasant evenings of music, and innocuous refreshments. At these small gatherings Sid drank his fruit punch, or plain lemonade, with becoming relish, and made himself as agreeable as possible. Often, too, she and Mr. Peabody discussed Sid, praising his good qualities, and the progress he was making at the bank. He was bound to be a successful man; one that would be a credit to any family, and so on and so on, for Emily's benefit, to which Emily said nothing, keeping her own counsel.

At Daniel Tewksbury's Ned's name was never mentioned, save between Mrs. Cutler and Priscilla when they were alone. Once in awhile Priscilla and Emily met and talked of him but Mrs. Peabody discouraged any intimacy with Ned's mother and sister.

Questioned about Ned by the people of the Corners, both Mrs. Cutler and Priscilla had been reticent. Like the Judge, they had felt that the less said about his aspirations the better, until there was some slight prospect of his possible success.

This reticence on their part, coupled with Dan'l Tewksbury's positive refusal to speak of Ned at all, confirmed the suspicion that he had been guilty of "something." The idea gradually became fixed and was accepted as a fact. Mrs. Ben Tewksbury gave frequent and loud thanks to her stars that "Sid was a boy that never give her a minute's trouble o' mind."

Ned's letters kept hope and life in Mrs. Cutler's breast. To her and to Priscilla, and also to the Judge, he wrote only the best of his fortunes.

September came and passed. Interest in Ned Cutler's "flight" from home; the hazardous wooing of "old man" Goslin; the contemplated monster fair for the benefit of the local fire brigade; the excitement caused by the request of Mr. Phelps, pastor of The . . . Church, that his salary be increased fifty dollars a year; the commotion among the merchants at the threatened advent of

a "Five and Ten Cent Store," and all other matters of local importance were temporarily put into the background by the approaching trial in law between Ben and Daniel Tewksbury.

The case had been set down for a hearing in July, but owing to the number of cases preceding it, one or two of which had proved unexpectedly lengthy, the Tewksbury suit was not reached before the closing of court and was thrown over to the fall term. The delay was most vexatious to both contestants — a stretch of nervous, impatient waiting, but at last the trial was definitely listed for the first week in October.

CHAPTER XXI

"THE BOYS" IN COURT

THE court room on the occasion of the trial of Tewksbury vs. Tewksbury was crowded with interested and expectant Cornerites. Everyone who owned or could hire a "conveyance," or who could beg, borrow or steal (as several enterprising boys wriggling their way into the court room bore witness) a ride, had come by team, or by team to Union Junction and thence to Litchfield by train. It was an occasion rivaling in excitement the annual pilgrimage to "see the animals" at the traveling circus.

A case held over from the previous day was being finished. It was of no interest to those who had been brought here by the impending struggle between the Tewksbury "boys," but the time of waiting was not without entertainment. It afforded opportunity for observation of the court room and its occupants . . . of the methods of counsel engaged in contesting the suit . . . there was some speculation as to how "Tuffts," of home talent, would come out when pitted against lawyers like these "city fellows."

The Judge was carefully considered by some, and speculations were indulged in as to whether, "from his looks," he would be likely to "lean" to Ben's side, or to "Dan'l's"; also it gave time for the complete assembling of all who had set out to attend the Tewksbury trial, and for unlimited exchange of comment and gossip in whispers and hushed tones upon everything and everyone coming within the range of interest.

Daniel Tewksbury, shaking inwardly with nervousness, though presenting a firm exterior, was early in a seat well up toward the front of the court room. Sitting next to

him — at Lawyer Tuffts’ special request — were Mrs. Cutler and Priscilla, pale and giving every outward sign of their agitation and distress.

The entrance of the Ben Tewksburys partook somewhat of the spectacular. They came in late — Ben, Maria and Sid — Mrs. Ben with head up and eyes defiant. With them, as though supporting their cause, came Mr. and Mrs. Peabody, and pale and shrinking as were Mrs. Cutler and Priscilla, Emily.

“It’s goin’ to be a match between Sid Tewksb’ry ’n’ Em’ly Peabody,” was whispered by more than one, as the little party filed in and took their seats.

As Mrs. Ben sailed down the aisle with her all-conquering tread, Mrs. Tibbitts leaned over and poked Miss Fitch. “Mariar looks dretful perky, don’t she?” she whispered, “Guess she thinks Lawyer Tuffts’ll be pretty small potatoes longside o’ Carp’nter ’n’ Gammell.”

“Course she’s sure they’re goin’ to beat. She don’t count on nothin’ else!” Miss Fitch’s answering whisper was shrill and penetrating. It reached Mrs. Lunn. That lady pursed her lips and delivered her oracle solemnly.

“There’s many a slip!”

Miss Fitch tittered and drew Mrs. Tibbitts’ ear closer. “She must be thinkin’ about old man Goslin. Hev you heerd that the childern is threatenin’ to hev a guardeen appointed over him?”

Mrs. Tibbitts opened her china-blue eyes wide. “No — ye don’t say! How’ll Mis’ Lunn git ’round that?”

The listening Mrs. Pettigrew laughed. “He bein’ an orphan, she kin adopt ’im to bring up.”

Mrs. Tibbitts’ eyes wandered off to “old man” Goslin sitting well up in front of the court room, and lingered over the white hairs sprouting sparsely around a dome of shining baldness.

“He ain’t fur f’m *second* childhood ’n’ that’s the trewth.”

“It’s his farm mor’n his beauty Mis’ Lunn’s takin’ into consideration, er I miss *my* guess,” chuckled Mrs. Pettigrew, under her breath.

"'N' if the childern could sep'rate the old man f'm the prop'ty I guess she'd be welcome to 'im," Mrs. Tibbitts whispered back.

"Whut you folks whisperin' about so interestin'?" Mrs. Lunn broke in, suspiciously.

"We was just sayin'," laughed Mrs. Pettigrew, "that love 'n' prope'ty air like them Si-mese twins. Ye can't separate 'em apart 'thout bringin' on a morshall diffickwilty."

A stir in the court room put an end to further talk. The case on trial had come to an end. "Tewksbury versus Tewksbury" was being called. After half a lifetime of wrangling, of threatening to "do" something, the "something" was at last being done. The Ben Tewksburys, with much important bustle, went well up to the front for a few words with Lawyer Carpenter, who was to represent them. They all shook hands; there was much smiling confidence and cordiality.

Those who had been subpoenaed to appear as witnesses came impressively forward to take front seats—among them Elnathan Tibbitts, "old man" Goslin and Mrs. Pettigrew. Judge Witherspoon, who had been standing in the back of the court room, came down the room about half way. He took a seat where he had a good view of the Daniel Tewksbury party.

Mr. Tuffts was first of the counsel to take his place—long of figure, of face, of hair; somewhat dull and solemn as to manner. Daniel eyed him with his first twinges of misgiving. Carpenter had left the Ben Tewksburys with effusive bows and smiles, and had followed Tuffts to the space reserved for the lawyers. He was portly, and to a degree, imposing; smooth-shaven, close-cropped, well-groomed, tailored with care. The Ben Tewksburys were very proud of him.

As Mr. Carpenter took his seat he nodded with patronizing affability to Mr. Tuffts, who responded with pleased deference. Daniel Tewksbury observed this exchange of amenities with frowning brows. In his opinion, the op-

posing counsel should have turned their backs upon each other, or met with the glare of battle in their eyes.

Mrs. Ben was well pleased. She bent toward Mrs. Peabody and whispered “Did you see Lawyer Carpenter smilin’ ’n’ bowin’ to Mr. Tuffts? Mr. Carpenter is *sech* a *gentleman* — ’n’ I guess he sort o’ feels a little bit sorry fer Tuffts — guess he thinks he kin *afford* t’ be agreeable to him.”

Here Mrs. Ben’s comments were brought to an end, the voices of Carpenter and Tuffts coming to her ears and claiming her attention. They were stating that they were ready for trial. The usual preliminaries were gone through. . . . The attorneys made a brief statement as to what the case was about . . . the twelve jurors acceptable to both sides were selected and sworn to try the issues in the case.

Lawyer Carpenter, with an air of breezy assurance, made the opening statement to the jury, telling them that he expected to prove that the defendant had been guilty of trespass upon plaintiff’s property, preventing him, by force, from taking possession of and using the strip of land (here followed the exact description of the lane, its extent and boundaries), and known generally as Lilac Lane. Mr. Carpenter went on to state that his client had been put to much trouble, inconvenience and loss by said trespass, and that he now sought the aid of the court to prevent the defendant from further interference with his property.

Here Daniel Tewksbury rose from his seat, wrath flaring in his eyes.

“ ’Tain’t his prope’ty, ’n’ you know it!” he cried out excitedly.

“Order! Order in the court!”

The imperative command, together with a vigorous pull at his coat tails by Priscilla, sent Daniel down into his seat again, his features quivering with suppressed anger.

The Judge turned a frowning glance of disapproval in his direction. . . . Tuffts shot at him a look of alarm,

of warning. . . . The Ben Tewksbury party smiled with satisfaction. "Dan'l Tewksb'ry was cert'inly showin' *jest* what *he* was." Daniel's head sank low in perturbation, one hand shading his eyes.

The case went on after this slight interruption. When Lawyer Carpenter had finished, Mr. Tuffts rose and addressed the jury. His words were insignificant, his manner subdued and distinctly unimpressive. Daniel's spirit sank lower within him. "Tuffts was making a poor beginning."

Mr. Tuffts was almost apologetic, as he said, "At present-ah, I wish to state simply that my client, the defendant-ah, denies that he has committed any act of trespass on the property of the plaintiff-ah. As the burden of proof rests upon the plaintiff-ah, therefore, in behalf of my client-ah, I will listen to whatever may be brought forward as alleged proof-ah, before saying anything more-ah."

Tuffts slid meekly back into his seat. Mrs. Ben whispered delightedly to her husband. "Tuffts ain't got a bit of 'git-up-'n' git,' hes he? Our man'll *jest* about set all over *him*."

Judge Witherspoon pricked up his ears. "Not so bad for the first start from the post — not-so-bad!" he chuckled, half aloud.

"Miss Artemesia Fitch, please take the witness stand." The sonorously impressive voice of Mr. Carpenter was heard throughout the court room. Miss Fitch bounded nervously from her seat and went forward to the designated place. After being duly sworn, "Where were you, Miss Fitch, on the fourth day of June last, between the hours of eight and eleven o'clock?" Counsel for the plaintiff questioned her.

Miss Fitch stared wildly at Mr. Carpenter, but did not answer. At close quarters to Judge, jury and lawyers, with the crowd of the court room facing her, all eyes bent upon her, Miss Fitch was unexpectedly suffering from stage fright.

"I asked, Miss Fitch, whereabouts you were on the

fourth day of last June, between the hours of eight and eleven o'clock A. M.?"

Miss Fitch's tongue, by degrees, unlimbered from its temporary paralysis. "Excuse *me*, Lawyer Carpenter," she fluttered apologetically; "I ain't deaf, but I jest *got* to hev a second to ketch my breath — not bein' used to swearin' 'n' bearin' witness out in public —"

Mr. Carpenter broke into the seemingly endless flow of words. "Please state where you were on the date and at the hour mentioned."

"You want to know if I seen the fuss twixt Ben 'n' Dan'l Tewksb'ry — I s'pose that's what you're drivin' at? Well, let me see; if that was the fourth of June — yes, it *was*, fer I remember now 'twas the same day we hed the ice cream festival, on'y we didn't hev it, 'cause Mrs. Ben Tewksb'ry was too upsot to make the cream — of course, you know, Mr. Carpenter, we couldn't hev no ice cream festival if we couldn't hev no ice cream —"

"Please state where you were on the forenoon of this day — the fourth of June."

"Oh, yes; I was comin' to that, but I wanted to be perfectly sure 'bout hevin' the right date in my mind, bein' as I'm talkin' under oath. But o' course, Mr. Carpenter, whether I was or whether I wasn't, I'd want the Judge 'n' the jurymens to know I wouldn't say nothin' but the trewth —"

"On this day, then, the fourth of June, between the hours of eight and eleven o'clock, where were you?"

"I was in Lilack Lane, with Mis' Pettigrew, Mis' Lunn 'n' Mis' Tibbitts —"

"For what purpose were you there?"

"We was gittin' Lilacks t' dec'rate the church fer the ice cream festival — ye know the one I told ye —"

"Yes — yes. Was no one else with you?"

"Mis' Ben Tewksb'ry 'n' after awhile Mis' Cutler 'n' Priscilla 'n' Em'ly Peabody 'n' Jestice Witherspoon kem, but on'y Mis' Tewksb'ry was with *us* a-getherin' the lilacks."

"What were the others doing?"

"They was sort o' talkin' together 'n' Mis' Cutler, she picked some o' the lilacks fer herself, 'n' us weemen was all a-wonderin' —"

"Were you gathering these flowers with or without permission from anyone?"

"Mis' Tewksb'ry asked us to come 'n' gether jest ez many ez we could carry back — 'count o' fixin' up the church pretty ez we could fer the —"

"Mrs. Ben Tewksbury invited you to gather these flowers, growing upon her husband's property?"

Mr. Tuffts interrupted, deferentially. "Your honor, I object to the use of the words — 'her husband's property-ah!' The particular piece of land where these lilacks grow is generally known as 'Lilack Lane,' and should be so spoken of, unless otherwise decided by the court-ah."

The Judge replied briefly: "Objection sustained. Use the name 'Lilac Lane.'"

The Ben Tewksburys looked nettled. For the first time since his outbreak, Daniel looked up with reviving courage. Mr. Carpenter went on undisturbed.

"How long did you continue gathering these lilacs?"

"Well — bein' under oath, I wouldn't like to say — jest to the minute, but it was fer a considerable long spell — we goin' on laughin' and talkin' 'n' never thinkin' nothin' what was goin' to happen —"

"Something happened, then?"

"Now, Mr. Carpenter, if that don't beat all the questions fer you t' ask — meanin' no offense, o' course — why, it was the fight that happened. I thought *everybody* knew that." Mr. Carpenter leaned back in his chair, bland and encouraging. "Oh, the fight! Be good enough to tell us who it was that fought."

"Why, Ben 'n' Dan'l Tewksb'ry, o' course."

"Why did they fight? For what reason?"

"Why, 'cause Ben Tewksb'ry was startin' to cut down the lilack trees, 'n' plough up the lane, 'n' Dan'l come up 'n' wouldn't let him do it. I declare, it jest made my blood run cold —"

"You say, Benjamin Tewksbury came to cut trees and plough up the land."

"Yes, sir."

"Peaceably?"

"Well, peaceable enough till Dan'l —"

"Dan'l Tewksbury came upon the land?"

"Yes."

"How far upon the land? How close to Benjamin?"

"Right up to 'im —"

"Peaceably?"

"*Peaceable* if ye call comin' right up 'n' shakin' an axe 'n' tellin' 'im right under his nose that he'd chop him into mince meat if he touched another tree, er words to that ef-
feck — if *that's* peaceable."

"Then Daniel came on the property, and with threats, prevented Benjamin from cutting down the trees and ploughing up the land?"

"That bein' the trewth, I got to say it, 'n' I'll hev to stick to it, Mr. Carpenter, though I don't hold nothin' agin Dan'l Tewksb'ry more 'n' agin Ben, 'n' I —"

"That will do, Miss Fitch; you may step down." Miss Fitch lingered with a slight air of protest, as if to say more. A rather imperative repetition, "You may step down, Miss Fitch," nipped her intention. She went to her seat hurriedly, with lips pinched tight in indignant protest. . . . "I'd jest got started, he might a-let me finish my say," she whispered to Mrs. Lunn.

"The rest on us got to hev a chanst," was Mrs. Lunn's rather unsympathetic answer.

"Mrs. Tibbitts, please be sworn."

"Oh, my land! I shall cert'nly faint. I *wisht* I hedn't been to the lane —"

Mrs. Tibbitts' eyes were larger and rounder and flatter than ever. She seemed suddenly to become quite weak and incapable of motion.

"*Where's* Elnathan?" she gasped, looking around helplessly for succor.

"Mrs. Tibbitts, please take the stand if she is present."

"Go on." Miss Fitch boosted her encouragingly up from her seat. "'Tain't half so bad after ye git goin'."

Under this impetus Mrs. Tibbitts reached the witness stand.

"What is your name?" queried Mr. Carpenter, after the formality of swearing the witness had been gone through.

"Tibbitts; I'm Mrs. Postmaster Tibbitts," was that lady's response in weakly trembling tones. She went on: "The's another Elnathan Tibbitts — you wouldn't think it, 'cause the name ain't common, but he works in the barber shop, besides bein' a sort of a cousin of Elnathan's — that's my husband, 'n' some folks do say that Elnathan — that's the one that works in the barber shop — was christened Elnathan, a-hopin' that Elnathan — that's my husband, 'd remember him in his will —"

"Yes, yes," Mr. Carpenter interrupted with some impatience. "Don't digress, Mrs. Tibbitts; please stick to direct answers. Where were you on the fourth day of June last?"

"I don't know —"

"You don't know?"

"— I can't remember —"

"*You can't remember* where you were on the fourth day of last June?" Mr. Carpenter's voice rose in sharp incredulity.

"I fergit." Mrs. Tibbitts' childish eyes were swimming, her voice quavered. "*Elnathan*, where was I las' fourth of June? I can't think o' nothin' and I dassent say nothin' fer fear o' sayin' suthin' Lawyer Carpenter'll snap me up on —" Her voice trailed off into tearful indistinctness.

Mr. Tibbitts hurried forward and addressed Mr. Carpenter soothingly. "In my private capac'ty as a husband I wish to say that Mis' Tibbitts means all right, but she inclines to be hystericcky at times. Jest ease up a little 'n' ye'll soon hev her tellin' ye everything she knows."

Mr. Carpenter found this true, but from the mass of verbiage some things to the point were extracted. Mrs. Tibbitts had not been present when Daniel met and threat-

ened Ben, but she supplied many details corroborative of Miss Fitch's statement.

"I wouldn't go through anythin' like that again, not fer twenty-five dollars," she gasped, when seated safely once more among her friends; "much less fer nothin' but to set Mariar Tewksb'ry up mor'n she's sot up a-ready."

Mrs. Lunn was the next witness. She was an impressive one. She was dramatically weighty and serious, and less discursive than Miss Fitch or Mrs. Tibbitts. Upon leaving the witness stand she turned to solemnly address the Judge. "But I think ye orto be leenient with Dan'l, Jedge. Leastways, don't send him to jail; I guess mebbe he wouldn't a-done what he done if he'd a-knowned he was goin' to be took up fer trespass." Mrs. Lunn took her seat with an air of having done her whole duty. If she had been obliged to give damaging testimony against Daniel, she had put in a plea for mercy toward him.

Mrs. Pettigrew was next called, followed by Judge Witherspoon. Mrs. Pettigrew seemed to be bubbling with inward enjoyment. Her replies were brief and gave only the information asked for, as were Judge Witherspoon's. This was a disappointment to some who had expected more from Mrs. Pettigrew; but she gave the distinct impression that she was holding in check much that was of a very amusing nature.

At the close of the examination of the witnesses for the plaintiff, Benjamin himself being the last one called to the stand, it had certainly been proved that Daniel *had*, by force, prevented Ben from making use of the lane. Mr. Tuffts had scarcely moved during the proceedings, and Daniel was growing restive at his inactivity. It was not until Ben Tewksbury had finished giving his evidence under the questioning of his attorney that Tuffts rose, to cross-examine him.

"You say that your intention—ah, in going to Lilack Lane on the morning of June fourth last—ah, was to cut down the trees and plough up the land—ah, for the purpose of putting it in a state of cultivation—ah?"

"Yes, Mr. Tuffts, that was what I went fer."

"You state that you were prevented from carrying out this intention—ah, by the unwarranted interference of my client—ah."

"I state that, Mr. Tuffts, most emphatic."

"How long, for how many years—ah, have you been cultivating your land—ah?"

Ben calculated for an instant. "'Bout twenty-three-four year."

"How much of your land have you cultivated—ah?"

"Ev'ry acre of it — 'cept Lilack Lane."

Ben's answer was quick; too quick to be halted by Mr. Carpenter's movement of protest.

"How does it happen—ah that you have left *Lilack Lane*—ah, *uncultivated* for all these years—ah?"

Lawyer Carpenter interfered hastily. "I object to the question as outside the issue."

"Objection sustained."

"When you started to cut down the trees—ah, and plough up the land of Lilack Lane—ah, did you think that my client—ah might offer any objection—ah?"

"I move that the question be stricken out — what the witness 'thought.'"

"Strike out the question."

People in the court room were beginning to sit up with interest.

"By gum, they're beginnin' to tussel, ain't they?" said Mr. Elnathan Tibbitts to his neighbor.

Ben Tewksbury was beginning to look a little bewildered. His wife's color was rising; she began fanning herself furiously with a piece of paper. The slightest dawning of a smile hovered around Daniel Tewksbury's set lips.

"Do you know—ah of any reason which may have led to the interference and alleged trespass on the part of the defendant—ah?"

Mr. Carpenter again broke in. "I object to the question. The plaintiff is not called upon to furnish extenuating reasons for the conduct of defendant."

"The objection is sustained."

"The witness may step down—ah," said Mr. Tuffts.

Ben hastily left the stand, plainly relieved.

Daniel Tewksbury was next called upon by Mr. Tuffts to testify in his own behalf. He admitted the details of his interference, according to the witnesses examined, but denied any act of trespass on the ground that Lilac Lane was his property. Here followed reading from the elder Tewksbury's will, in which the west one hundred and twenty acres were bequeathed to Daniel. Surveyors were brought forward to testify as to the boundaries of said west one hundred and twenty acres as showing that they included Lilac Lane. In rebuttal, of course, the portion of Mr. Tewksbury's will was put in evidence, which gave to Ben the east one hundred and twenty acres. The surveyors who had first driven the stakes which had started the boundary dispute, gave their testimony to the fact that the measurements of Ben Tewksbury's east one hundred and twenty acres included the strip known as Lilac Lane.

The crucial point was being approached. The disputed title of Lilac Lane was to be decided in court. If Ben won, then Daniel lost the lane, the thousand-dollars damages and the costs of the trespass suit. If Daniel won—

"But that wan't likely," people whispered. Carpenter was fighting fast and hard, and Tuffts had subsided for awhile. Seemingly, he had "given out."

Counsel for the plaintiff brought forward a number of witnesses with the purpose of showing that it was the intention and design of the elder Tewksbury that Benjamin should have his full specified acreage. Among them were "old man" Goslin, Mrs. Pettigrew and Judge Wither-
spoon. Mr. Goslin, called to the stand, was questioned by Mr. Carpenter.

"What is your name?"

"Don't know my name? Yes — jesso — jesso — thought ye did, though, seein' ye called me by it. Goslin; Sam-u-el Goslin wuz the name bequeathed to me by my parents; didn't leave me nothin' else, nuther. Wan't nothin' left by

my folks fer the childern t' quar'l over. Yes — jesso — jesso."

"How old are you?"

"What's that? — want t' know how old I be? Yes — jesso — jesso."

"State your age, Mr. Goslin. How many years old are you?"

"Jesso — jesso; well, I'm forty-eight, er ther' abouts."

"Forty-eight," Mr. Carpenter repeated in surprise; "remember, you are under oath."

"He-he-he. Think I'm lyin' to ye? Yes, jesso; never 'd a-thought I was that old if I hedn't told ye, would ye? Yes — jesso — jesso."

With an air of delighted, if somewhat tottering juvenility, Mr. Goslin drew himself up and cast a gallant smile toward the section of the room where sat Mrs. Lunn.

Mr. Carpenter's handkerchief played a prominent part about his mouth for an instant before he spoke again. "With the permission of the court I will strike out that question and substitute one more pertinent."

"Strike it out."

"You were acquainted with plaintiff's father for a long time — a good many years?"

"Ever sence we ust to swap marbles 'n' steal eggs to suck 'em, by gum! Yes — jesso — jesso."

By degrees, and with more or less discursion, Mr. Carpenter managed indirectly to gain from Mr. Goslin several statements giving the impression that preference in this issue should be given to Ben.

"I rick'lect onct the old man sayin'," Mr. Goslin reminisced, "that Ben c'd do a good man's work at twelve year of age, 'n' Dan'l wan't wuth the skin he wore off the soles of his feet till he was passin' fifteen. Yes — jesso — jesso."

When Mr. Carpenter had finished his questions, Mr. Goslin, leaving the witness stand, suddenly bethought himself of something, and turned hastily back again. "I git

paid fer all this here witnissin', don't I? Yes — jesso — jesso. Dollar, ain't it? Jesso."

"You'll be paid; step down, Mr. Goslin."

"I'd like t' see the money. Dollar a day, ain't it? — 'n' five cents a mile fer travel? Jesso — jesso; fourteen mile 'n' a quarter, Jedge —"

"You'll get it; step down."

"Jesso — jesso. Where do I go fer it? Fourteen mile 'n' a quarter, five cents a mile, 'n' one dollar, that's a dollar 'n' —" Here a court officer gently guided Mr. Goslin away from the witness box. "Oh, you takin' me t' where I git paid? Yes — jesso — jesso. One dollar 'n' — le' me see — five cents a mile fer —"

Mrs. Pettigrew was recalled to the witness stand for further examination by Mr. Carpenter.

"You recollect the late Mr. Tewksbury?" he asked.

Mrs. Pettigrew's voice was rich with the gurgle of half-repressed laughter. "I hadn't orto hev any diffickwilty doin' that, sence I'm jest a year older'n Sam Goslin."

Numerous glances, accompanied by more or less audible smiles, were turned upon Mr. Goslin.

"You often talked with Mr. Tewksbury?"

"Not to say often. He was one o' them kind that sort o' shet up talk. I guess Mis' Tewksb'ry never needed no vinegar t' curdle the milk when *he* was 'round," Mrs. Pettigrew concluded, with an unctuous laugh.

"Did you ever have any conversation with him which referred to the disposition of his property?"

"I remember a talk we had onct suthin' that way."

"Repeat the conversation as it occurred."

"This was a good many years before the will was actchelly made," Mrs. Pettigrew replied with cheerful alacrity. "We was all comin' out o' church one Sunday 'n' I happened to come out alongside o' the Tewksb'rys. Mis' Tewksb'ry looked all-gonelike 'n' Tewksb'ry was more solemn 'n' usyal 'n' I'd noticed his 'amens' 'd been louder 'n' they hed fer some time. 'What's the matter?' I asked

Mis' Tewksb'ry. 'I'm ailin',' she said. 'That's good,' I says, laffin'; 'ailin' folks never die. What's the matter with Tewksb'ry?' I asked. 'He's worryin',' Mis' Tewksb'ry says. Tewksb'ry heard her 'n' turned round. 'Yes,' says I, laffin', 'I noticed he was hollerin' amen 's if he didn't believe the Lord was listenin'. What's the pertickler trouble now?' 'It's my prope'ty,' said Mr. Tewksb'ry. 'It's on my mind. I'd orto make my will 'n' I don't know how I'd best do it.' 'Well,' says I, 'you've been worryin' all yer life so fur to *git* some prop'ty 'n' now you're worryin' 'bout gittin' red of it.'"

Mrs. Pettigrew paused for a second to indulge in a jovial chuckle. "What did Mr. Tewksbury reply?" prompted Mr. Carpenter.

"'It'll go to the childern, o' course,' says he, 'but the *diffickwilty* is — which one on 'em ought to git the most?'

"'I wouldn't lose no sleep worryin' over that,' I says. 'The' won't be any of 'em half as long spendin' it ez you've been earnin' it, er I miss *my* guess.'

"'I d'know — I d'know,' says Tewksb'ry, shakin' his head; 'Ben's sharp, 'n' he's clust, 'n' he's a good worker. Course,' he says, 'Marthy's on'y a woman — but Ben — he's a smart boy — he kin take keer o' what *he* gits.' I asked him, 'Where does Dan'l come in?' I heerd folks say he wan't jest took up with Dan'l 'n' I wanted to heer what he'd say."

"What *did* he say?"

"He took to shakin' his head agin' 'n' says, 'n' he was ter'ble dubious 'bout it: 'I d'know — I d'know, Dan'l ain't got the faculty Ben's got; somehow er other he don't seem to come on reel smart.'

"'Oh,' I says, 'Dan'l'll come on all right if ye give him time, er I miss *my* guess. All's the matter with him is he's a little behind the season in sproutin'.'"

Mrs. Pettigrew was dismissed from the stand to make room for Mr. Elnathan Tibbitts. After being sworn, Mr. Tibbitts stood beamingly at ease, swelling out with pleased importance.

"What is your business?" questioned Mr. Carpenter.

"My o-ficial business or my pussonal business?"

"Oh, both."

"In my o-ficial c'pac'ty I hev the honor of representin' the United States Gov'ment — bein' Postmaster at Columby Corners. Pussonally, I conduct Tibbitts' Emporium — dealin' in an on-ekalled line o' gen'ral merchandize. In which-so-ever c'pac'ty — er both — I am a-testifyin' I wish to say that I am speakin' in a sperrit friendly to both plaintiff an' dee-fendant, both on 'em bein' good customers o' mine —"

The flow of Mr. Tibbitts' eloquence was checked. "Exactly — of course we understand that. Now, Mr. Tibbitts, you knew the plaintiff's father?"

"Well, yes, when I was a young feller round here, jest commencin' t' shine up t' Mis' Tibbitts over there" — Mr. Tibbitts stopped to cast a fond look, presumably in Mrs. Tibbitts' direction, then went on — "I ust to see the old man off 'n' on 'n' talk with him *con-siderable*."

"Did he ever express in your hearing any uneasiness regarding the division of his property?"

"Jest onct, me 'n' him was talkin', leanin' over the fence. 'You got a fine farm,' says I; 'your boys'll be fixed out good,' says I. 'Yes,' says he, thinkin' like — 'it's most too bad t' hev t' split it up.' Thinkin' a minute longer 'n' me not knowin' jest what to say, says he: 'Ben's the best farmer; he could git more out o' the land 'n' Dan'l could — seems as if Ben orto t' hev it.' But when the old man's will was read 'n' I seen he'd split up 'n' give 'em each a even hunderd 'n' twenty acres apiece, I thinks to myself —"

"Please confine your testimony to what you heard, not what you thought, Mr. Tibbitts."

Mr. Tibbitts endeavored to focus a gaze of offended dignity upon Mr. Carpenter.

"I have made affydavits as to all I heard positive — but my reflections is gener'ly *considered* to be enlight'nin' on sich here tangled-up questions."

"Your direct testimony will suffice for the present; you may step down, Mr. Tibbitts."

Judge Witherspoon, recalled, was on the stand but a few moments.

"You stated that you were acquainted with the late Mr. Tewksbury for a number of years?"

"Yes."

"That you drew up the will left by Mr. Tewksbury?"

"Yes."

"Did it seem to you — did you think that a preference for the elder son was indicated?"

There was a small twinkle in the Judge's eye. "If it please the court, I will confine my testimony to what I did — not what I thought."

"Court sustains witness' reservation." The Judge paused, with an inquiring glance at Mr. Tuffts, but that gentleman remained quiescent to the point of stupidity.

The Judge seeing no sign of life in Mr. Tuffts went on. "The court orders the testimony of Elizabeth Pettigrew and Elnathan Tibbitts stricken out; being an attempt to show preference on the part of Mr. Tewksbury, it is not admissible as evidence."

Daniel shot an angry glance at Mr. Tuffts. Why hadn't he known enough to prevent Lib Pettigrew and Tibbitts from telling how his father had always favored Ben? The Ben Tewksburys were elated. They could see now how much smarter Lawyer Carpenter was than Tuffts. He had got in the testimony and it didn't matter if the Judge had ruled it out. The jury had heard it and it would make an impression. That was what Carpenter had wanted. They could see that.

"Tuffts acts like he didn't hev a leg left t' stan' on!" whispered Mrs. Tewksbury delightedly, to Mrs. Peabody.

But now Tuffts was speaking — slowly — without the appearance of attaching much importance to his questioning. He had called Mrs. Cutler to the stand. She was pale and evidently much perturbed, but in a gentle and sweet, though trembling voice, she made her statements

clearly in answer to Mr. Tuffts’ queries. Her age, her relationship to the plaintiff and also to the defendant; their relative ages; her state and length of widowhood; the number of her children, their ages and numerous other matters of like import were brought out with an occasional objection from Mr. Carpenter. Then very casually Mr. Tuffts asked:

“Where do you reside—ah?”

“With my brother, Dan’l Tewksb’ry.”

“In his home—ah?”

“Yes.”

“Where do your children—ah make their home—ah?”

“My daughter lives with me—at her Uncle Dan’l’s, I mean.”

“And your son—ah?”

“He did live with us—but—he—he’s been away fer a spell.”

Significant looks were exchanged among the people from Columbia Corners and more than one sympathizing glance was directed at Mrs. Cutler.

“But he did live with you—ah—at his Uncle Dan’l’s for a long time—ah?”

“For pretty nigh twelve years.”

“What portion—ah of your father’s estate did you inherit—ah?”

“The house—which was called the homestead ’n’ ’bout fifteen acres o’ land.”

“Who lives in this—ah homestead now?”

“My brother Benjamin.”

“How does it happen—ah that your brother Benjamin lives in the house bequeathed to you—ah whilst you and your children—ah live with your brother Daniel—ah?”

The object of Mr. Tuffts apparently pointless interrogations was becoming manifest. Mr. Carpenter opened his lips as if to “object,” but seemed to think better of it.

“Ben bought it.”

“Was it a free or forced sale—ah?”

The Ben Tewksburys were becoming annoyed. They

looked as if they might rise to interfere if Carpenter did not do so very soon.

"The' was a morgidge — if that's what ye mean," Mrs. Cutler faltered — "the' was *two* morgidges."

"Who held these mortgages—ah?"

"My brother — Ben 'n' Mariar — it was Mariar's money — Mr. Cutler was onfort'nate — 'n' sick — 'n' Mariar — she let us hev the money."

"And when you couldn't pay—ah the mortgage was foreclosed—ah?"

"No — no — not to say that; the' wan't no trouble. I hed t' hev a little more money — 'n' I couldn't pay — ner the int'rest — so the' wan't nothin' t' do but fer them t' take the place —"

Every juror's eye noted the sudden mist that dimmed Mrs. Cutler's — every juror's ear caught the pathetic, though uncomplaining quaver of her voice. Lawyer Carpenter was in a predicament; if he "objected" to Mr. Tuffts' line of questioning he would seem to be fearful of something damaging to his clients being brought out. Mr. Tuffts suddenly switched to another line of query. "You say—ah, that you are older than either your brother Benjamin or your brother Daniel—ah?"

"Yes."

"As an elder sister you must have observed—ah that your father favored your brother Benjamin more than he did your brother Dan'l—ah?"

There was a sudden wave of astonishment as Mr. Tuffts took what had seemed to be his opponent's chief weapon of attack and thus turned it, as it were, against himself. Mrs. Cutler hesitated for an instant, then answered deprecatingly: "It did look sometimes that way, Ben bein' the first — 'n' allus strong 'n' well. Dan'l was spindlin' like when he was growin' 'n' Pa didn't hev much patience with del'cate folks."

"Your mother—ah — felt the same way—ah?"

Mrs. Cutler protested eagerly, "'Twas jest t'other way, Mr. Tuffts. Ma allus seemed tend'rer o' Dan'l — 'cause

he *was* sort o' sickly, I guess. She was ter'ble fond o' Dan'l, I remember; ust to call him 'her baby boy' till he was most growed up."

Again every juror's eye sought Mrs. Cutler's face with its faint smile of pleasant reminiscence touching her trembling lips. Mr. Carpenter was on his feet with an objection to this as being irrelevant, which objection the court sustained.

With one or two other questions Mr. Tuffts ended his examination of Mrs. Cutler. She was promptly put under cross-examination by Mr. Carpenter, who brought out with much emphasis, that in the matter of mortgages on the homestead and its subsequent transfer to her brother Benjamin, she had been well satisfied and that she had to the best of her knowledge received market value for the property.

Priscilla, being called to the stand, was asked only her residence and how long she had made her home with her Uncle Daniel. With the recalling of Daniel himself by Mr. Tuffts to answer several questions—among them queries as to how long after his parents' death he had continued to live in the homestead; under what conditions; the reasons for his leaving it; and the length of time he had lived with strangers before building his own home, Mr. Tuffts closed his examination of witnesses for the defendant. That Mr. Carpenter objected to most of the questions—some of the objections being sustained by the court, seemed not to trouble Mr. Tuffts at all. He apparently gained his object with merely putting them, whether an answer was allowed or not.

The evidence on both sides being closed, Mr. Carpenter began his argument to the jury. He was alert and impressive. His arguments were incisive, brief and convincingly businesslike. The claim made by his client, the plaintiff, that defendant had violently attacked him and prevented him from making use, as he had intended, of the strip of land known as Lilac Lane, had been substantiated by numerous witnesses and admitted by defendant

himself. Said defendant's contention that said Lilac Lane was his property and not the plaintiff's made it necessary to determine a question of the disputed title before the jury could render a verdict in the suit brought by plaintiff against defendant for trespass. Mr. Carpenter contended that Benjamin being the older son should by right have precedence over the younger. While in this country we had no laws of direct inheritance, still we had imbibed from our forefathers the feeling that the eldest son was the head of the house and that to him the preference should be shown in the division of an estate. It was one of the unwritten laws, Mr. Carpenter stated with melodramatic stress. Moreover, it had been shown by reliable witnesses, although the evidence had been stricken out, that plaintiff's father would undeniably have wished his elder son to inherit his full number of acres—and still further—that said elder son having worked harder and for a greater number of years upon the farm than the younger son, had actually *earned* the right to insist upon his full measure of land as against said younger son. The fact that the elder son was first mentioned in the will should give him the first chance to take his full allotted number of acres. The fact that plaintiff had been the first to survey and stake off his allotted amount of land should be an added argument in his favor—possession being “nine points of the law,” and in this case a possession justified by all the attending facts of the case.

When Mr. Carpenter had concluded his summing up the Ben Tewksburys and their supporters looked well pleased. To them his arguments seemed logical and invincible. Many of the arguments Mrs. Ben recognized as out of her own mouth—and had she not always felt the convincing truth of them? Had she not always been sure that if ably presented to Judge and jury they would at once recognize their validity? Her withering gaze of triumph and disdain rested upon Tuffts as he rose, shambling, to plead his forlorn cause.

Mr. Tuffts opened his mouth to emit an uncertain and long drawn out “A-hh,” which was followed by an equally

uncertain, long-drawn out and solemn, “my brethern—a-hh.” The attention of the jury was fixed curiously upon Mr. Tuffts—more or less covert smiles were passed from one to another of the more knowing ones about the court room. Mr. Tuffts continued, still hesitatingly but gathering fluency as he progressed: “You are called upon to-day—ah to settle a question of disputed title—ah between two brothers—ah, and my opponent, the council for the plaintiff—ah, has given you many specious arguments as to why the plaintiff should be given a favorable verdict against my client, the defendant—ah. He says because his client is first named in his father’s will—ah. But does not the Scripture say, he that is first shall be last and he that is last shall be first—ah? Counsel for the plaintiff says that because plaintiff is the elder son he should be shown a preference over the younger son! that it is a custom—ah, or thought—ah, that we have inherited from our forefathers—ah, He should have said our *foreign* forefathers—ah! for *my* forefathers—ah, and I believe *your* forefathers—ah, if not *his* forefathers—ah, were among those who fought in that bloody *Revolution*—ah, that was destined to knock down the barriers of injustice and make men equal—ah—younger brothers equal with elder brothers—ah. In this land of democracy—a-a-ah! *there should be no law of primogeniture—ah.*”

Mr. Tuffts was warming up. His “ahs” flowed more freely and more and more frequently.

“Counsel for the defendant—ah,” Mr. Tuffts continued, “claims that the father’s preference for the elder son—ah entitled him to full acreage—ah, and gives to the younger son a shortage of acres—ah! Look at the picture—ah and say if this is so—ah; the elder son, strong, well, able to work—ah; and for this reason—ah his father’s pet and pride—ah. On the other hand, the younger son—ah, delicate, sickly from infancy to middle youth—ah; because of this—ah misunderstood—ah, undervalued—ah by the parent, who in his strength should have cherished him more tenderly—ah; but the delicate youth was not without a friend—ah—*his*

mother-ah! Look on this picture-ah. The mother watching in love-ah over the least favored child — her ‘baby-boy-ah.’”

Mr. Tuffts voice rose and fell with emotional cadence. Numerous glances were cast at the bearded and grizzled Daniel, whose head was hanging a bit sheepishly. A broad grin wreathed Mr. Carpenter’s lips, but the faces of the Judge and jury were inscrutable.

“That mother’s love was perhaps instrumental in shaping the father’s will-ah, so that his prejudice did not extend beyond the grave-ah. He meant to be just at the last-ah! He gave to the younger son an equal portion with the elder son-ah. But now the elder son-ah, the stronger son-ah, the always more favored son-ah, seeks to wrest a portion of the younger son’s inheritance from him-ah; because he was shown more favors in his father’s lifetime he claims he is entitled to more favors by his father’s death-ah. But I contend it should be the other way-ah; the son who profited the less should now profit the more-ah, and if that mother-ah, that mother whose heart was always more tender-ah, more sympathetic for the weaker son-ah — if she was here to speak — would she plead as counsel for the strong-ah, the lucky-ah, the more prosperous plaintiff, the ‘elder son-ah,’ or would she plead as counsel for the defendant-ah, her delicate, put-upon poor, unfortunate baby-boy-ah!”

Mr. Tuffts closed this peroration by a vigorous blowing of his nose and ostentatious rubbing of his eyes on an adroitly convenient handkerchief. Mr. Carpenter had ceased to smile. He was sitting up and closely scrutinizing the faces of the jurors.

“But as the strong and the proud seek the strong and the proud-ah,” continued Mr. Tuffts, waxing more and more fervent, “so the less fortunate seek the less fortunate to give them sympathy and help-ah! The younger son ousted from the home of his father’s by the coming of the family of the elder son-ah, finally built for himself a house on the acres bequeathed him by his deceased parent-ah, and

to it he took his sister—ah and her children—ah, as she has herself just now testified—ah! The strong, the favored elder brother had prospered—ah; he had married a wife with substance—ah and with the aid of her patrimony he had in time of misfortune and of sickness and death—ah acquired from his widowed sister the homestead which had been her inheritance—ah, and in which she was no longer welcome—ah. Homeless and poor—ah, the widow and the orphans were taken to the home of the defendant in this case—ah. For more than twelve years they have been sheltered—ah, and fed—ah, and clothed—ah, by *him*—ah, whilst the plaintiff has prospered and grown fat upon the land bequeathed to him—ah and to his sister—ah and brought to him by his wife—ah. And *now!* Now—a-a-h! he would grasp this strip of ground—ah! this Lilac Lane—ah! and wrest it from his poorer and his weaker brother—ah; he seeks to have him charged with trespass and to mulct him of damages—ah! because he came upon the land and prevented himself from forcibly adding it to his own possessions—ah! and now, my brethern, shall the strong and the proud prevail—ah? Shall the favored son—ah! the grasping son—ah! the son who has been all for himself and *all for his family*—ah! shall *he* prevail—ah? or shall the weak and lowly—ah! the poor—ah! the weak—ah! the son who was his mother’s ailing, delicate baby boy—ah! who has worked hard—ah! prospered but moderately—ah! yet out of his substance has for over twelve years cared for the widow—ah! and the orphans—ah! shall *he*, the *defendant* in this case—ah, *prevail a-i-l a-hh?* It is for you, my brethren, to make the decision—ah-h!”

Lawyer Tufts sat down, mopping his brow. He had wrought himself up to a height of emotionalism that had surprised his hearers and carried many of them with him. Mrs. Ben Tewksbury was aghast at this view of the situation. It was all put in a wrong light and she knew there were things could be said to put them right; but just what should be said she was too confused now to think; and, suddenly, all the times she had expressed her relief at

the removal of Mrs. Cutler and the children from her house flashed across her memory. But who would ever have thought of its coming up against her like this?

Mr. Carpenter wasted no time in attacking Mr. Tuffts' argument and attempting to destroy any impression it might have had upon the jury. The court room, he declared, was no place for the introduction of foolish emotionalism. They were there to arrive at the merits of this case upon a basis of law and reason; not upon a false, hysterical and ridiculous appeal to emotions. His opponent's attempt to cast aspersions upon the character of his client was preposterous—not worth consideration. Plaintiff's sister had herself testified that she had been perfectly satisfied with the business arrangements involving the transfer of her property; and so on, and so on, to the great satisfaction of Mrs. Ben and all the Ben Tewksbury faction, did Mr. Carpenter assail the eloquent harangue of Mr. Tuffts.

He was done at last; it was a noble fight for his client. The Judge gave his instructions to the jury. They were given dispassionately; but there was unquestionably a leaning toward the side of the defendant.

The jury filed out. In ten minutes they filed in again. Their verdict was against the plaintiff.

Ben Tewksbury had lost his case and was saddled with the costs of the suit. His attorney at once made a motion for a new trial, on the ground that the verdict was against the weight of the evidence. Mr. Carpenter's arguments for a new trial were listened to, but promptly denied by the Judge. Mr. Carpenter then prayed an appeal to the Supreme Court, which was granted.

CHAPTER XXII

OPINIONS OF THE VERDICT

THE Corners was galvanized by the happening of the unexpected. Daniel Tewksbury had won the lawsuit. Lawyer Tuffts' impassioned plea had turned the scales and a sympathetic jury had done the rest.

The Putnam House and Tibbitts' Emporium became battle fields of words. Elnathan Tibbitts covered himself with glory, rising to surprising heights of eloquence. "I feel," he said, taking a position of vantage and addressing the crowd in his "Emporium" with the voice and gestures of Fourth of July oratory; "I feel jest like gittin' out 'n' ringin' bells 'n' blowin' horns er suthin'; I feel jest like I 'xpect the 'Merican eagil feels flappin' its wings 'n' singin' 'Columby, the Gem O' the Ocean'; the hull county'll be settin' up now 'n' takin' notice o' Columby Corners; they'll all know we're on the map; 'n' right here I want to say they all got to take off their hats to Lawyer Philo M. Tuffts fer downright brains 'n' sma'tness; he wuz cock o' the walk over there in Litchfield with them other lawyers 'n' he kin crow over the hull of 'em; we got a man o' mark right here fer a neighbor that we orto be proud of. By jingo! we orto crow with 'im; fer he'll mebbe send the name o' Columby Corners rattling down to posterity in the 'cyclopedies; *fer*, 'twouldn't s'prise me a mite, feller citizens, if our distinguished contemp'rary, Philo M. Tuffts, sh'd wind up in the halls o' the legislater."

"My sakes," ejaculated Miss Fitch in admiration; "ain't it jest grand the way Mr. Tibbitts kin talk? He orto be into the legislater himself."

"That's what I say," responded Mrs. Tibbitts, her infan-

tile eyes glowing with pride; "but folks don't know, fer it ain't often that Tibbitts lets himself go."

"The' ain't often sech an occasion," Mr. Tibbitts replied with deprecating modesty. "It ain't everybody gits a chance to show whut kind o' stuff the' is in 'im. Now there's Tuffts — he's hed his chanst 'n' he's jest shot plumb up to the top."

Mrs. Pettigrew laughed.

"Now whut you laffin' at, Lib Pettigrew?" Mrs. Tibbitts showed some spirit.

"Oh, nothin' much." Mrs. Pettigrew wiped a tear of mirth from her eye. "I was just thinkin' how easy 'tis to fall down when you're up top."

"Do you mean the Tufftses?"

"Well, I ain't specifyin' ner yet prophesyin'; but if it *should* be the Tufftses I'd like t' hev a tintype o' Cynthy Tuffts when she hits the bottom." Which idea seemed so humorous to Mrs. Pettigrew that she laughed until the others joined in from mere force of contagion.

"Do I understand, Mr. Tibbitts," broke in the solemn tones of Mrs. Lunn's deep voice, "that you side with the Tufftses in this here matter? You mustn't fergit that what's bean one man's settin' up hes bean another man's downfall, 'n' the Ben Tewksb'rys is an older fambly here than the Tufftses, 'n' they *hev* always bean o' more consequence. I d'know but what I lean toward Ben Tewksb'ry."

"Yes — jesso — jesso," piped Mr. Goslin from a far corner.

"You're fergittin'," spoke up Miss Fitch sharply, "that *Dan'l* Tewksb'ry's been here jest as long ez Ben — allowin' fer the difference in time o' his bein' borned."

"Yes — jesso — jesso," came again from Mr. Goslin's corner.

"I ain't holdin' up either side egzactly, Miss Lunn." Mr. Tibbitts felt that diplomacy required him to hedge a little. "Bein' in a publik cap'city, servin' all with groc'ries *as well* as holdin' the offis o' postmaster, it ain't fer me to show partiality either ways; *but* I sh'd be lackin' in publick

sperrit if I didn't feel proud o' Philo M. Tuffts as representin' the brains o' Columby Corners."

"O' course, puttin' it *that* way —" Mrs. Lunn assented —

"They say," said Mrs. Tibbitts, "that Anson Peabody's ter'ble cut up over Ben gittin' beat, 'n' feelin' sore again Lawyer Tuffts; *Elnathan* heard him, *didn't* ye, El? over to the hotel."

"Sh'd say I did hear 'm. It was night 'fore last. The Jedge had jes' come out onto the piazza after hevin' a lemonade —"

"Of course," interrupted Mrs. Pettigrew, laughing; "the' wan't no doubt about its bein' a *lemonade* —"

"'N' he was settin' tilted back in his chair — you know the way he alwus sets onto the piazza — when along comes Anson Peabody.

"'What do you think o' that blamed fool' — o' course I'm makin' some omissions in the language used, seein' I'm tellin' it to wimmin folks — 'What do you think,' says he, 'o' that blamed fool verdick?'

"'Why,' says the Jedge, cool like; 'I ain't been thinkin' about it at all.'

"'O' course,' says Peabody; 'it wouldn't be perfesh'nal ettykwet fer you to *say*; but ye must know that Tuffts give a dumb fool argyment.'

"'Oh, I d'know,' says the Jedge, kinda twinklin' his eye; 'I thought Tuffts romped home in putty dam good style! he beat Carpenter by a good sight mor'n the length of his nose.'"

"Mr. Tuffts *ain't* got a very long nose," Miss Fitch put in, as Mr. Tibbitts stopped for breath.

"Elnathan," warned his spouse; "you're fergittin' about the langwidge; the Jedge's is jest ter'ble sometimes."

"I s'pose you'll laugh, Mis' Pettigrew," Miss Fitch digressed; "but I can't give up wishin' thet we could bring the Jedge into the fold."

Of course Mrs. Pettigrew *did* laugh. "Ye never will, Artemishy, onless ye ride 'im through the church door on a race hoss."

"Go on, Mr. Tibbitts," urged Mrs. Lunn eagerly; "whut reply did Anson Peabody make to the Jestic?"

"He sort o' flustered up 'n' spluttered like a fire in the stove does if ye accidentally spill a little water onto it, an' says he:

"'Ye think Tuffts wuz all right, do ye, an' the verdick wuz all right?'

"'It ain't my time to think,' says the Jedge, keepin' cool.

"'Well,' says Peabody, 'it's *Ben's* time to think, 'n' he's thinkin' hard. The S'peerior Court's boun' to reverse the denial fer another trial. He'll appeal, an' if he gits another fool decision he'll keep on appealin'.' The Jedge answers quick. Says he: 'When a feller gits a tooth pulled out he keeps puttin' his tongue in the hole, no matter if the dentis' tells him it's the wust thing he kin do.'"

Here Mr. Tibbitts stopped to refresh himself with a drink of water.

"I kin say f'm experience *that's* the trewth," interjected Miss Fitch, while Mr. Tibbitts drank deep.

"Go on, Mr. Tibbitts; whut wuz the finishin' off of the argyment?"

"Well, Mis' Lunn, I can't say ez it egzackly finished off at all; it jest kinda petered out. 'Then ye'd advise Ben not t' appeal?' asks Peabody, 'ye'd advise 'im t' knuckle under 'n' let Dan'l best 'im?'"

"Then the Jedge gits up 'n' gives his legs a stretch 'n' says he, swearin' easy, 'I give the boys my advice before they went into court; didn't charge 'em a cent fer it neither, 'n' they wouldn't take it even at that price. I don't see no use o' offerin' any more at this time,' he says, and into the hotel he goes —"

"To git another lemonade, I s'pose," laughed Mrs. Pettigrew.

"And Peabody — he started in runnin' down Tuffts to some o' the others, 'n' the' wan't lackin' folks that stood up fer Tuffts, 'n' I tell *you* the talk fer 'n' against was handed out hot and heavy fer a spell." . . .

So the town found itself dividing into factions. There were "Tufts'" and "anti-Tufts'" factions. Those who were "fer" or "against" the Ben Tewksburys; and in Mrs. Ben's opinion, all who were not actively *for* were decidedly against them.

There were sympathizers for Dan'l and others who declared "he was a close-fisted cuss anyway, 'n' might a-give up the lane seein' Ben was the oldest."

Mrs. Ben Tewksbury cut Mrs. Tufts publicly. Her vexation of spirit grew with the rapid rise of Tufts stock and she shortly announced her intention of withdrawing from The . . . Church, of which the Tufts were active members.

The minister's wife was moved to tears over this possibility. "Mrs. Tewksbury was always so liberal at donation times; I was always sure of having a whole pound of Tibbitts' *best* tea; and now she says she's going to leave the church. Andrew, it's your duty to talk to her; she really ought not to feel such animosity toward the Tufts; it's unchristian."

"Yes, my dear, I will speak to her; as you say, it is my *duty* to do so. The church cannot afford to lose any of its influential members."

But when the good man, pinched and enervated by a life of scantily remunerated spiritual shepherding, approached Mrs. Ben with timid exhortations, he was almost overcome by the force of that lady's ire.

"*No!* Never will I step my foot inside that church agin so long as the Tufts air members!" she declared obdurately.

Mr. Phelps shuffled his hands together with a weak, helpless movement. "May it not be, dear sister, that you should accept this adverse decision meekly? May not Mr. Tufts be but an instrument in a dispensation — a trial sent by Providence to test your Christian forbearance?"

"I don't know; mebbe so — mebbe so; the ways o' Providence seems past findin' out sometimes; but we ain't sure yit that the Lord means fer Dan'l Tewksb'ry to git

the best of us — with Lawyer Tuffts helpin' 'im. We're goin' to take it to ev'ry court in the lan', 'n' we'll wait till the last word's been said 'fore we say which side the Lord's on. Fer my part, I can't see why he sh'd give Cynthy Tuffts such a settin' up 'n' I don't perpose to set in no church pew where she kin flant her new clo'es in my face — bought with the money her husban' earned a-puttin' *us* in the wrong."

Again the Parson rubbed his hands together weakly, a helpless look growing on his face.

"Isn't it just possible that brother Tuffts might have bought those clothes with other money? Tuffts *has* some practice —"

Mrs. Ben interrupted him. "Cynthy Tuffts never hed sech a bunnit in her life afore."

So, notwithstanding the anxious parson and his drab little wife, Mrs. Ben and her family quit the church in high dudgeon, to the secret edification of the Tuffts and the grim mirth of Daniel Tewksbury.

As to Daniel himself, the decision in his favor had worked in him a complete transformation. So far from shunning the village and public gatherings, he was in frequent evidence. From morose, taciturn looks and ways he became pleasant, almost sociable.

"I ain't never knowed Dan'l to be so easy 'n' nice to git along with sence he was a boy to home," Mrs. Cutler confided to Priscilla. "I do hope it'll keep up," she added dubiously.

"I *hope* so," Priscilla echoed devoutly; "but it seems most too good to last."

Even the prospect of an "appeal" which it was pretty certain by this time Ben had decided to make, did not put a damper on Daniel's good spirits. "Me 'n' Tuffts beat Ben onct, 'n' I guess we kin do it twict," he said whenever the matter was brought up.

The town was, of course, divided as to the wisdom or non-wisdom of Ben's course and what the result would probably be.

Judge Witherspoon, tilted back in his chair on the piazza of the Putnam House, industriously chewed his tooth pick and refused to commit himself to any opinion; but as he chewed, he gazed into space with a far-seeing look, as if beholding things beyond the ken of his non-professional questioners.

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CHAPTER XXIII

GETTING ALONG A LITTLE

"SAY, Ned, lend me a fiver, will you?"

"A fiver?" Ned looked up from his lunch box at his companion sitting near him on a bank of earth, stones and up-turned sod; a good-natured looking young fellow eating his lunch of bread and cold meat with a gusto born of hard work, good digestion and an easy conscience. "What's the matter with you, Jim? You must think I'm a traveling gold mine."

"Oh, come; you've got it in your clothes; I know you have."

"Well, suppose I have; don't you think I've got use for it? Do you know how much you owe me now?"

"Yep; twelve dollars and fifty cents up to date."

"What do you do with your money anyway, Jim? You haven't any business to be blowing it the way you do — and mine along with it."

"Say, Ned, I'm always telling you you ought to be studying for a parson 'stid of an engineer; now what kind of a life can a fellow have that's always doing what he *ought* to do? I'm sorry for you; I am for a fact."

Ned laughed. "I've been brought up to save money. Every dollar I've ever owned has had to have about two hundred cents in it. Perhaps it's been different with you. I don't think I'm cut out for the parson business though; there's more old Adam in me than would be good for a preacher."

"You haven't let any of him loose since you've been around with us." This good-natured sally came from a "transit man" who came up just in time to hear Ned's speech.

"And he's always trying to put the brakes on me," said Jim. "Gives me the check *hard* with an icy '*no*' when I ask him for a fiver."

Ned laughed again. "I didn't say no — here's the five."

"You're the stuff for a chum, Ned. I'll have ten dollars' worth of fun out of it — and I'll square up next pay day — honest injun, I will."

"Come on in town with us to-night, Ned," urged the "transit man"; "we've got onto a poker game."

"Why, I'm liable to make back this five and a lot besides!" exclaimed Jim enthusiastically. "You've got another fiver there — you can take a hand too — you're liable to double."

"I guess I'd better know a little more about poker before I take any chances. You can make me jealous tomorrow showing me all you win."

Work on the road had been commenced and Ned was taken on as one of the "gang" of laborers. Mr. Searles expressed his regrets that still nothing better offered as a beginning than day laborer. Did he still wish to accept such a very menial position? Without hesitation, Ned did. After which, for a moment, Mr. Searles' keen eyes, deep set under projecting brows, seemed to Ned to pierce him through and through.

That night a letter went from Mr. Searles' private office to the engineer in charge of the construction of the road. He was asked to observe Ned, without letting him know that he was in any way singled out from the other laborers. If, in the engineer's opinion, the young man was worth the trouble, he was to give him all possible opportunities of getting some practical knowledge of the engineering part of the work and advance him to the first vacancy that he was capable of filling.

So Ned made his start under more favorable auspices than he knew. He had been used to hard work all his life and now that every blow seemed to help break down the barriers standing between him and his desires, he was happier than he had ever been in his life. He was proud

as a lord of his small daily wage—his by right of the sweat of his brow. He had worked as hard for his Uncle Daniel—and had been made to feel that he was eating the bread of sufferance. He paid his own way now; he had returned to Justice Witherspoon that twenty dollars which, all unknown to the Justice, had disappeared with his satchel on that first eventful day in Boston, and he had sent his mother a little money. He was counting on sending her fifteen more “when Jim paid up.”

“Jim” was one of those individuals who are liked by everybody—for some reason no one can explain exactly. He was a “good fellow”; he was good-natured; he was always in good spirits; he was good company; he was a good spender; he was a good borrower; he was bad pay; but everyone must be excused for some failing.

The morning after Jim had borrowed the five dollars, which was expected to prove so profitable in the poker game, he did not put in an appearance when work began. The engineer called Ned. “Take Jim’s place until he gets here,” he said.

At noon, while they were eating their lunch, Ned said to the transit man: “Well, ain’t you going to tell me about the fortunes you and Jim made last night? Where’s Jim?—off spending his?”

The transit man grinned. “Fortune nothing; say, you won’t see Jim again.”

“Won’t see Jim again? Why not?”

“Well, you know Jim was a good borrower. What he couldn’t borrow wasn’t worth while taking. I’ll bet he owes every one in the outfit—unless it’s the engineer—and I won’t be so sure about him.”

“What’s that got to do with his not coming back?”

“That poker game last night was an awful socker. Jim told me after it was over that he was going to vamoose.”

“We wouldn’t have been hard on him, any of us. I

need the money and need it bad, but Jim ought to know I wouldn't have been hard on him."

"He didn't want to face the music. He thought he'd better light out for some place where he could begin all over again — borrowing, I mean."

That afternoon the engineer came to Ned. "You are chainman — until you're something better, Ned."

"Thank you, sir," said Ned; then added rather forlornly: "It'll seem all-fired lonesome without Jim around, won't it?" Ned was beginning to learn that fortune always exacts some hostage.

CHAPTER XXIV

NED'S MOTHER SEEKS THE JUDGE

MRS. TEWKSBUURY was spending the afternoon with Mrs. Peabody. She had brought her sewing and seated at Mrs. Peabody's front window was successfully doing three things at once—carrying on a heart to heart talk with Mrs. Peabody, taking note of all that was passing upon the street, and setting a few delicate stitches as an intermittent accompaniment.

"Of course, from the fust Lawyer Carpenter said that when the hearin' come off the' wouldn't be no doubt about our gittin' another trial," she was saying; "but fer *myself* I wan't so sure fer a spell. After that first verdick I wan't sure *what* to expect f'm the law."

"I think," Mrs. Peabody replied, "that the decision will be in your favor the next time."

"I suttinly think it will be, 'n' Lawyer Carpenter says he's boun' to win this time. But we got to pay him all over again—that'll make it pretty expensive; but I says to Ben I guess we kin hold out as long as Dan'l Tewksb'ry kin."

"A little longer, I should imagine." Mrs. Peabody's tone conveyed small opinion of Daniel Tewksbury's resources. "When is the trial coming off?"

"Well, mebbe not till spring term o' court, Lawyer Carpenter says. I wish 'twas comin' up right away; the's no tellin' what Dan'l Tewksb'ry 'n' that Tuffts'll be hatchin' out between 'em if they hev time enough. Mis' Peabody, I b'lieve that's Marthy Cutler 'n' Priscilla—yes—'*tis!* *walkin'* too. After Dan'l Tewksb'ry gittin' the verdick 'cause he'd been so good to 'em, seems to me he might furnish a hoss 'n' wagon fer 'em to come into town with!"

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Emily had risen and gone to the window. She was wondering what had brought Mrs. Cutler into the village. Could it be anything about Ned? Was anything wrong? She wished that she could make some excuse to go out where she could meet them; but she could think of nothing plausible.

"I feel sorry for Mrs. Cutler," Emily heard her mother saying. "She has had so much trouble; and now that son of hers —"

"The' don't anybody seem to know jest where he is ner what he's doin'," Mrs. Ben chimed in.

"Of course," said Mrs. Peabody, speaking with an emphasis which Emily knew was directed toward her, "they must have reason to be ashamed of his conduct in some way or they wouldn't be so reticent about him."

"Of course," Mrs. Tewksbury assented; "they couldn't keep from talkin' about him more'n I can about *Sid* — if he was anything to be proud of."

"*Sid* is really doing splendidly at the bank; Mr. Peabody is *so* pleased with him."

Mrs. Tewksbury swelled with pride and pleasure. "I'm ter'ble glad to hear that. I know he's been workin' hard's he could; don't never seem to want no ree-creation, 'cept goin' to Young Men's Christian Association over to Millwell along with Will Hubbard. *Such* a son is cert'nly a blessin' to any mother."

"Why do *Sid* and Will go to *Millwell*?" Emily still standing at the window, asked the question idly. "There's ever so much bigger Y. M. C. A. in Litchfield."

"It's on account o' the gymnasium, Em'ly. *Sid* says the one they got in the Y. M. C. A. in Millwell is ahead o' the one in Litchfield; 'n' bein' confined so much in the bank all week goin' there Saturday afternoon 'n' nights gives him a good chanst fer athletics."

"And it's more of a change for Will," said Mrs. Peabody, "than it would be if *Sid* went to Litchfield."

"Oh!" was Emily's only comment. She had heard not much more than the hum of their voices, so intent was

she upon her wish that she might speak with Mrs. Cutler and Priscilla — hear Ned's name spoken with kindness.

"There they go into Tibbitts' store!" exclaimed Mrs. Ben. "Mebbe they've come into town expectin' letters. Tibbitts tells Sid they git letters f'm Ned off 'n' on. Fust they come f'm Boston 'n' after a spell the postmark was dif'rent. 'Twas sort o' blurred so Tibbitts couldn't make it out."

"He is a kind of rolling stone probably," said Mrs. Peabody; "and like all other rolling stones, he isn't of much account."

"Tibbitts says Jestice Withersp'n gits a letter f'm him occasionally."

"The Justice seems to be the only one outside the family that knows anything about the unfortunate young man. Of course you know all about the Judge getting him away from here. The Judge may still be helping him to conceal some misconduct, who knows. Of course he wouldn't let on to anybody."

"Well, I must say Marthy ain't got anyone to thank but herself. I always was tellin' her she'd spoil him, wantin' him always to hev his own way."

"They're coming out now; Mrs. Cutler looks feeble, doesn't she?"

"Yes, 'n' 'tain't to be wondered at. If Priscilla'd a' got *married* it might 'a' helped Marthy out some; fer some reason she never hes."

"It was said at one time that a son of old man Goslin's was paying her some attention."

"Yes, I b'lieve he did see her home f'm evenin' meetin' sev'ral times, 'n' took her out sleigh-ridin' some. The' was one or two others sort o' shined up to her, so I *heard*; but they allus cooled off pretty quick. Priscilla couldn't seem to ketch 'em; she's goin' on *twenty-nine* — goodness knows where she'd ever git a chanst *now*. Guess she was jest borned to be an old maid, she was always fussin' over cats 'n' dogs — 'specially cats."

"Judge Witherspoon is coming out of his office now;

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it looks as if he had seen them and was coming out purposely, doesn't it?"

"It suttinly does. Yes — no — they're stoppin' to talk with Miss Fitch 'n' Mis' Pettigrew. The Jedge is bowin' 'n' smilin' like anything; notice that? I'm gladder ev'ry day Ben didn't take his advice about the lane; he suttinly favors the Dan'l Tewksb'ry side."

Judge Witherspoon had really come out of his office to speak with Mrs. Cutler and Priscilla, but his intention was frustrated by the appearance of Miss Fitch and Mrs. Pettigrew.

"Well, I declare, *Mis Cutler*; if it ain't good fer sore eyes to see *you* 'round; we ain't hardly seen ye sense — well, not fer quite a spell." Miss Fitch was really kind at heart and she forebore mentioning Ned's going away. "You're gittin' popular, Priscilla; every time I see *you* lately you got a letter. Ain't got a beau, hev ye?"

Priscilla laughed. "I've given up all hope, Miss Fitch." She slipped the letter, which was from Ned, into her pocket without enlightening Miss Fitch as to its sender.

"Well," said Miss Fitch, "you kin give up hope if you want to, but *I* ain't a-goin' to — not so long as Mis' Lunn kin find some one to love her."

Mrs. Pettigrew laughed. "We're goin' to see Mis' Lunn now. I s'pose you know she's sick abed."

No, Mrs. Cutler and Priscilla did not know.

"Yes, jest plumb knocked out with them childern of old man Goslin's a-pesterin' her." Miss Fitch gave them the information with much indignation; "'n' Mis' Lunn sech a nice woman, too."

Mrs. Pettigrew laughed again as she said, "Widows 'n' widowers is allus lookin' fer fresh trouble, 'n' they don't hev no diffickwilty in findin' it."

"We're goin' 'round to try 'n' chirk her up a little bit," Miss Fitch's manner breathed doleful anticipation.

"What's Ned up to these days?" Mrs. Pettigrew's tone indicated her usual cheerful pessimism as to the condition of the person under consideration.

Miss Fitch's volubility spared Mrs. Cutler and Priscilla from making a direct answer. "Ain't he *never* comin' home fer a visit?"

"Oh, yes; we expect he'll come some time."

"Oh, I see," said Miss Fitch; "he's goin' to do like the young man I was readin' about in the paper — make his fortune 'n' then come back 'n' s'prise us all."

Mrs. Pettigrew laughed again. "Them cases is sup-prisin'; the' ain't many o' the prodigals that brings the fatted calf back with 'em."

"We must be goin', Mis' Pettigrew, er we won't git to Mis' Lunn's to-day. Good-bye, Mis' Cutler; good-bye, Priscilla; when you write to Ned, tell him I'm lookin' fer him back some day with money to burn! jest as well to encourage 'em," she continued sympathetically to Mrs. Pettigrew, as they passed on. "I guess Priscilla 'n' her Ma feel pretty cut up about Ned. Wouldn't wonder if that letter was from him, but he can't be doin' *much* er they'd a said somethin' more about 'im."

To which Mrs. Pettigrew replied, chuckling cheerfully: "What kin ye expect? Ned favors his father, 'n' Cutler never could manage to git two pairs o' pants together 't onct."

CHAPTER XXV

THE JUDGE GETS A DAHLIA

"OH, Priscilla! I *wisht* Miss Fitch 'n' Mis' Pettigrew hedn't come along! Now the Jestice—he's gone—'n' mebbe we won't see him again, after our *comin'* here for a chanst to talk with him." Mrs. Cutler's voice quivered with a vexation that was close to tears.

"We'll go on to Winkworth's store; I need a new pair of rubbers. Perhaps the Judge will come back to his office by that time," Priscilla consoled her.

On their way back past Justice Witherspoon's office they dragged their steps until in their self-consciousness it seemed as if everyone who saw them must know that they were trying to attract his attention. No Judge appeared.

"He isn't there," said Priscilla.

"Jest as I said; we'll hev to go back without seein' him!"

They walked on a few steps in silent disappointment. Suddenly, a hearty voice accosted them.

"Why, Mis' Cutler, how de do? I'm glad to see ye. Good afternoon, Priscilla; I'm most as glad to see you as I am to see your Ma." The Judge had come out of the Putnam House and was shaking them warmly by the hand.

"Now what do you make of *that*, Mis' Peabody?" queried Mrs. Tewksbury, looking on from Mrs. Peabody's front window. "That looks t' *me* 's if they was pretty thick. I shouldn't think Marthy Cutler 'n' Priscilla'd want to be seen shakin' hands in publick with Jestice Wither-sp'n, *considerin'* his repitation."

"It looks more than ever to me," said Mrs. Peabody, "as if the Justice is acting for them in a legal capacity in whatever trouble the son has got into."

Mrs. Cutler was grasping the Judge's hand convulsively. "I don't know what you'll think of us, Jedge; we been walkin' up and down the street wishin' we'd meet ye — we came in just on purpose to see ye — but we didn't let on 'twas fer that," candor compelled her to add.

The Judge's eyes sought Priscilla's. "Any trouble?"

"No," Priscilla smiled back. "Ma just wants to talk about Ned."

"Come into my office —"

"That's jest what we can't do; that 'ud look as if we'd come a purpose, 'n' Dan'l'd wonder about it; Dan'l gits queer notions sometimes."

"I'll walk along a little way and you can talk —"

"Yes; I'll tell ye jest as quick as I kin —"

"If he ain't turnin' and walkin' along with 'em!" exclaimed Mrs. Tewksbury, in some excitement. "I bet that Ned's got into some fresh scrape — fetchin' Marthy into the village on foot."

Emily felt herself grow a little sick and faint with apprehension. Had something happened to Ned?

Mrs. Cutler began hastily to unburden her mind. "You been so good to Ned," she said, "'n' I jest felt ez if I couldn't wait no longer to hev a little talk with ye 'bout him. We been gittin' letters right along an' he seems to be feelin' pretty good 'n' encouraged; but I d'know if he reely is er if he's on'y writin' hopeful like to keep us f'm worryin'."

"Now *don't* you worry a mite, Mis' Cutler. Ned's been writin' to me, too, and I've inquired some about him from headquarters. From all I kin find out the boy's well, workin' hard, 'n' behavin' himself. That's pretty near as much as ye kin expect under the circumstances."

The little puckers in Mrs. Cutler's face seemed to relax. Her eyes brightened.

"I'm awful glad t' hear ye say that; but Ned could do better if he hed more schoolin', couldn't he?"

"Well, I d'know as schoolin' ever hurt anybody; but some folks seem to get along pretty well with jest hoss sense."

"Then ye don't think it 'ud do Ned good to go to school agin?"

"Ma'am, I didn't exactly say *that*. If Ned could go to the right place it 'ud prob'ly boost him along consider'ble."

"Then, Jedge, this is what I want to ask ye. Would thirty dollars, er mebbe a little more, be any good to him towards gittin' more larnin'?"

"It 'ud be thirty dollars ahead o' nothin', ma'am."

"Ned's been sendin' us money 'n' we been savin' it. He says that when the weather gits too bad they'll hev to quit work fer a spell. So I been thinkin', if he hed money he could go some'eres 'n' study whilst he was layin' off work."

"That's a fine idee, Mis' Cutler; ye couldn't a-planned anything better."

The Judge's hearty appreciation and interest emboldened Mrs. Cutler to go on. "An' I want to ask ye, Jedge, if ye'll keep the money fer us? We got thirty dollars now 'n' Ned'll prob'ly send more 'fore he quits workin'. I'm gittin' nervous hevin' so much t' take keer of — feerin' somethin' 'll happen to it."

"S'pose I vamoose with it?"

Priscilla looked up at him, smiling. "I guess there won't be any danger of *that* if it was thirty *thousand*." At which the Judge flushed warm with pleasure. It was an unexpected tribute to his character — from a woman.

"I'll take it, of course, ma'am; if it'll relieve your mind." The Judge's eyes twinkled. "Mebbe I kin put it where it'll earn some int'rest."

"And Ned ain't to know 'till the time comes; it's to be a sort o' surprise fer 'im."

"Not a word, ma'am. Meantime I'll be makin' inquiries about the best place fer Ned to go, where he kin exchange the least possible amount o' money fer the biggest possible amount o' trigonometry, and so forth."

Mrs. Cutler beamed delight. "I don't know how Ned 'd ever git on without ye."

"Oh, tut — tut, ma'am; now don't. What I've done wouldn't blind anybody if 'twas put into their eye."

"Jedge, how'll we git the thirty dollars to ye?"

The Judge reflected. "How would it do fer me to drive past your place about ten o'clock to-morrow mornin'? You could be at the gate — er Priscilla — she bein' the youngest — 'n' hand it over to me."

"That'll be all right, Jedge — 'n' thank ye."

With this understanding they separated, the Judge returning to his office, Mrs. Cutler and Priscilla going on their homeward way.

"There's the Jedge comin' back at last," said Mrs. Tewksbury. "Now I *would* like to know what they been con-flabin' about all this time."

Emily gazed apprehensively out of the window. The Judge was coming back with a swinging elastic step, both hands thrust in his trousers pockets, his face beaming, his lips puckered, as if whistling softly to himself. Emily drew a long breath of relief. The Judge would not look like that, she was sure, if there was any trouble about Ned.

Mrs. Cutler and Priscilla continued on their way; each seemed engrossed in her own thoughts. Finally Priscilla spoke.

"You must be tired, Ma. Let's sit down on these big rocks for a few minutes; it's warm and sunny in this hollow under the hill. We'll read Ned's letter while we're resting."

The letter bore the news of Ned's promotion and of his loss of seventeen dollars and fifty cents. It also contained the five-dollar bill which he had forbore "doubling" in the poker game. The letter was read, reread and discussed, with much rejoicing over Ned's advance. Then they resumed their walk again in thoughtful silence, which Priscilla was again the first to break. "It's nice, ain't it, Ma, to have some one to look out for you, and sort of take an interest in advising you, as the Judge did just now."

"Yes," Mrs. Cutler assented; "that's the way yer Pa allus was; so kind 'n' thoughtful. The Judge kinda reminds me of him, sometimes; though yer Pa," she hastened to add, "was never a sinnin' man, like the Jedge."

"I don't see why folks are always saying something about Justice Witherspoon's *sins!*" Priscilla flared out, with a heat that astonished her mother. "I don't believe he's any worse sinner than other folks are—I don't care what anybody says."

The following morning at ten o'clock Mrs. Cutler, watching from the window, saw the Judge tearing along far down the road. "He's a-comin', Priscilla; run out by the gate now." And as Priscilla was flying out of the door, the little roll of bills held tight in her hand, "Don't talk longer 'n ye kin help."

"Ma, ain't you ever going to get over —"

"I know, Priscilla, but the weemen here hes allus been afeerd o' the Judge. I'll stan' out on the step; it'll look better if anyone should happen to be passin'."

But much of this was lost on Priscilla, hastening down the walk to the gate. The Judge was almost there. Priscilla stopped for a second beside a clump of dahlias. A few late blooms were holding up their gorgeous heads in defiance of drear November. She plucked the finest one.

"Good mornin', Priscilla." The Judge drew his horse up to the gate.

"Good morning, Judge."

"That buttonhole bokay fer me?"

"Yes," Priscilla answered, smiling, as she handed up the dahlia with the little roll of bills pressed against its stem.

"Thirty?" asked the Judge.

"Thirty-five. There was five in the letter we got yesterday—and good news, Judge!"

"So? What's that?"

"You know—Ned's chum, Jim?"

"Yes; Ned wrote he was a great fellow."

"Well, Ned loaned him seventeen dollars and a half, and he's run away without paying him."

"Great! Ned's doin' fine to be able to lose seventeen-

fifty. By ginger! I give him all sorts of advice about *borrowin'* money, but I never thought to say a word about lendin'."

"But, you see, Judge, Jim has gone for good, and the engineer put Ned in his place — he's promoted to chainman! Oh, Judge! I believe he's going to get on, *really get on*; don't you?"

"I wouldn't wonder a mite if he did, Priscilla. He's taken the first step up, and that's most always the hardest one to take. I see yer Ma standin' out there on the porch —"

"Yes," said Priscilla, flushing consciously.

"Well, you tell her that I think it's safe to begin bettin' on Ned. I think he's going to come out all right in the wash. Ain't got a pin, hev ye? I didn't expect to have a buttonhole bokay throwed at me, so I ain't pervided."

Priscilla took a pin from her gown and handed it to him.

"This is a mighty pretty flower," he continued, as he rather awkwardly pinned the dahlia to his coat.

"I guess you like pretty things," said Priscilla. "You always have a pretty horse." Her eyes rested admiringly upon the Judge's trotter.

The Judge looked pleased. "You think so? I onderstand some folks object to this one; say she picks up her feet too fast. They don't like her complexion, so they paint 'er black. It's astonishin'," he went on, with a laugh, "how dead-set some folks is on usin' black paint."

Again a burning flush of consciousness swept Priscilla's face. Her eyes sought the ground. When she looked up the Judge was laughing. "Tell ye what, Priscilla," he said, leaning a little over the wheel toward her, "black paint don't reely hurt anything that don't soak it in." And Priscilla, flushing more than ever, made haste to change the conversation. "Of course you've heard that Uncle Ben has won the right to appeal — and the law case is going to be tried again?"

"Yes, I know. What did yer Uncle Dan'l say when he found out?"

"Nothing, he just shut his mouth tight."

"That means fight — and more fight."

"How do you think it's going to end?"

"Priscilla, if I was on as intimate terms with the chief purveyor o' fire 'n' brimstone as some folks think I am, I'd ask him. He's about the only one knows how it's comin' out."

"Priscilla! Priscilla!" Mrs. Cutler's voice reached them faintly.

"I've got to go, Judge; Ma wants me. Good-bye — and we both thank you for being so good to us."

On his way back the Justice suddenly unpinned the dahlia from his coat and crushed it into his vest pocket.

"If they see me wearin' *this*, they *will* want to know where it come from; guess 'twon't do to be seen wearin' flowers f'm Mis' Cutler's garden."

The next day the maid at the Putnam House, tidying the Judge's room, discovered a rather mussed and wobbly looking dahlia adorning his tooth-brush mug. With small ado she dumped the flower into the basket of waste, and unsentimentally restored the mug to its legitimate sphere of usefulness.

CHAPTER XXVI

ANOTHER TILT AT LAW

INTEREST in the reopening of what was now gathering a reputation as "The Lilac Lane Case," was more widespread, and the attendance was larger than at the first trial. Tuffts, who had risen to fame in a day, was a strong magnet of attraction. Even Judge Witherspoon showed a more lively curiosity than he had manifested in the beginning.

"Guess I can't miss the trial," he said to the habitués of the Putnam House piazza; "dummed if I don't want to be there to see what Tuffts'll bring out of his sleeve *this* time!" With an amused chuckle he stuck his cigar into the corner of his mouth and fell into a state of abstraction.

"Ye can't git the Jedge t' say what *he* opines'll be the outcome o' this here lawin' business," remarked one of the listeners, confidentially, to Mr. Tibbitts, who thereupon, peering over the top of "The Weekly Gazette," fixed a bulging, near-sighted, cross-eyed gaze upon the unconscious Judge. "The Jedge *is* clust," he agreed; "shets up like a jackknife if ye ask him what he thinks about it, but f'm his *looks*, I sh'd say he hed some interestin' *idees* on the subject."

"Tuffts ain't sayin' much, nuther."

"Jest like he didn't the first time."

"*Mis'* Tuffts — *she's* goin' round with her chin in the air 'n' her mouth tight shet — ain't lettin' a word drop."

"Jest like she didn't the first time. By hunk! I bet a cookie Tuffts is nussin' *suthin'* that'll s'prise everybody."

So the speculation as to what Tuffts was going to say, or do, created a widespread desire to be on the spot when he should bring out the surprising thing he was keeping so jealously hidden "up his sleeve."

The scene in the court room when the day of the trial finally arrived, and the procedure, were a repetition almost of the memorable first hearing. Witnesses were called, recalled, cross-examined; evidence was "objected" to, "sustained," or "stricken out," but nothing especially new was offered.

A slight digression was caused by "old man" Goslin when it became apparent that Mr. Carpenter was about to close his examination of witnesses and Mr. Goslin had not been called upon to testify. He had been anxiously twisting and turning about and bobbing up and down in his seat for some time. He now rose and pushed his way to the front. "How be ye, Mr. Carpenter? Feelin' pretty well these days? Yes—jesso—jesso. Kinda fergittin' me, ain't ye? Yes—jesso—jesso. It's gittin' late 'n' I jest thought I'd mind ye I got to git home 'fore dark—them's my orders. S'pose ye know my childern don't 'low me out after dark? Yes—jesso—jesso; 'n' I want to ask ye now, Jedge, whilst I got a chanst, if them childern o' mine 'a' got enny right —"

Mr. Carpenter broke in decisively. "We won't detain you, Mr. Goslin, we don't require your testimony."

"Don't want me t' witness? Yes—jesso—jesso! Ain't I goin' to git my dollar—'n' my five cents comin' 'n' goin' fourteen miles 'n' a quarter? S'pose ye know I spent my money comin' here? Yes—jesso—jesso, 'n' them childern holdin' me down tight fer ev'ry penny, 'n' I want t' ask ye right now, Jedge, whilst I got a chanst, if them childern got enny right t' keep me f'm what I earned 'fore they was borned—some on 'em—"

Here the officer who had previously been required to remove Mr. Goslin appeared once more to steer him away, Mr. Goslin affably allowing himself to be removed. "Seen you here before, didn't I? Yes—jesso—jesso. Didn't know's you'd 'member me—" Mr. Goslin's voice trailed off in plaintive queries as to where he should go to collect his "dollar 'n' five cents comin' 'n' goin' fer fourteen miles 'n' a quarter—"

Attention now became fixed upon Mr. Tuffts. People were regarding him expectantly. Oddly, Mr. Tuffts seemed to have nothing new to offer. He examined Mrs. Cutler, as before. This time Mr. Carpenter said nothing.

Mr. Tuffts again called Priscilla, questioning her as before. It was here that Mr. Carpenter became active. He recalled Mrs. Cutler to the stand for cross-examination. She was closely questioned concerning the mortgages upon her property. . . . The absolute necessity for raising money was shown . . . it was brought out that the last loan secured could not have been got from anyone unless holders of the first and second mortgages who wished to acquire the property at market value. The fact that she herself and the children had continued to live with the plaintiff and plaintiff's family was dwelt upon. . . . The length of time . . . the tender ages of the children; . . . the inability of the children to perform any work was brought out . . . that they being so young required much of her time and attention was developed — though she "helped Mariar 'round the house what time she had" was admitted. Mr. Carpenter then plunged boldly into the time of their leaving plaintiff's house and going to that of defendant. Defendant had asked them to come. . . . Their leaving plaintiff's house had not been in response to any demand of plaintiff . . . their going had been purely voluntary.

Here followed question after question as to the life at defendant's. What work she did . . . what work Priscilla did . . . what Ned did . . . in minute detail. He brought Mrs. Cutler to admit, inadvertently, that they had all done a great deal of work — that they had worked hard. That they had received no wages for what they had done. The statement was wrung from Mrs. Cutler that defendant and Ned had disagreed — that Ned had gone away — that Dan'l had forbidden him to come back.

It was a cruel grilling and it left Mrs. Cutler in a state of nervous collapse. As question after question, adroitly put, wrung from her hesitating lips the record of their daily

toil for "Dan'l," she realized how damaging her testimony would be to his case. As she took her seat near him, after leaving the stand, she turned upon him a glance of pleading appeal—but his stony face was turned away from her and his eyes were fixed upon Mr. Tuffts in desperate anticipation.

Priscilla's testimony was but a corroboration of that given by her mother.

Mr. Carpenter's argument to the jury was a withering arraignment of any claim defendant might make to Lilac Lane upon the sympathetic plea of "caring for the widow and the orphans." Rather, he averred, might plaintiff make that claim, since he had cared for them when they were unable to work in payment for their bread.

The previous verdict in favor of defendant he claimed to have been given upon an insufficient understanding of the case and an appeal to sympathy upon false grounds.

When Mr. Carpenter had finished there was a sort of breathless turning toward Mr. Tuffts. *Now* was the time when Tuffts was to bring out of "his sleeve" the great, the mysterious "something" which he had been guarding with that sphinx-like air of profound wisdom. He began:

"A-h-h-h, my brethern—a-h-h-h!" Did Mr. Tuffts seem dazed? Did Mr. Tuffts seem not so cock-sure of himself? But no—it could be only their imagination—Tuffts was "jest tunin' up." Mr. Tuffts went on. "You are called upon to-day to settle a question of disputed title between two brothers—ah, and my opponent, the counsel for the plaintiff—ah, has given you many—" here something seemed to stick in Mr. Tuffts' throat but after a slight clicking sound he went on—"many specious arguments as to why the plaintiff should be given a favorable verdict against my client, the defendant—ah. He says because his client is first named in his father's will—ah, but does not the Scripture say he that is first shall be last and he that is last shall be first—ah?"

As Mr. Tuffts progressed wonder grew on the faces of the listeners. Ears were strained to catch his utterances.

What was coming? *When* was that mysterious *something* going to be pulled out of "his sleeve"? Something *must* be coming.

"Counsel for the plaintiff says that because plaintiff is the elder son he should be shown a preference over the younger son; that it is a custom—ah or thought—ah that we have inherited from our forefathers—ah. He should have said our foreign forefathers—ah! for *my* forefathers—ah, and I believe *your* forefathers—ah, if not *his* forefathers—ah, were among those who fought in that bloody *Revolution*—a-ah that was destined to knock down the barriers of injustice and make men equal—ah, younger brothers equal with elder brothers—ah. In this land of democracy—a-ah there should be no law of primogeniture—a-h-h."

Incredulous amazement was dawning upon the faces of the listeners. Tuffts' buncomb had gone well before. It had indeed been singularly effective, but it fell dull and flat in its repetition.

On and on went Mr. Tuffts, repeating himself . . . he labored hard . . . he tried to rouse himself to that enthusiasm with which, on the occasion of the first trial, he had enthused his audience . . . he pumped and gesticulated, but without response. Gradually it was forced upon the minds of all present that Tuffts had nothing to say except what he had said before.

With painful effort he reached the climax of his peroration—"and now, my brethern; shall the strong and the proud prevail—ah? Shall the favored son—ah! the grasping son—ah! the son who has been all for himself and for all his family—ah, shall *he* prevail—ah? *OR* shall the meek and lowly—ah! the poor—ah! the weak—ah! the son who was his mother's delicate "baby-boy—ah!!" who has worked hard—ah!! prospered but moderately—ah; yet out of his substance has for over twelve years cared for the widow and the orphans—a-ah—shall he, the *defendant* in this case, prevail—a-i-l-a-a-h? It is for you, my brethern, to make the decision—ah!"

As Mr. Tuffts sank into his seat, bewildered and spine-

less, Mr. Carpenter threw himself back in his chair and in defiance of all court rules roared with laughter. The infection spread and surged over the court room. When order was restored the Judge read his instructions to the jury.

They were almost a direct ruling for the plaintiff.

It was expected that the jury would come to an immediate decision, but at the end of an hour they were still out, and as the time had arrived for the adjournment of court for the day an agreement was reached for the returning of a sealed verdict. There seemed to be small doubt, however, in the minds of the assemblage as to what its nature would be.

Daniel Tewksbury on his way out was accosted by a stranger. "Your case wasn't handled at all, Mr. Tewksbury; if you lose it, it'll be the fault of that pin-head Tuffts."

Daniel stared at the man, dully, for an instant, then went on without answering.

CHAPTER XXVII

DANIEL EATS THE CROW

THE Judge, first to reach the Corners on the home-coming after the trial — his mare passing everything on the road from Union Junction — was hailed eagerly as he alighted at the Putnam House.

"What's the news, Jedge? Did Tuffts sock it to 'em agin?"

"Tuffts? *Tuffts!*" The Judge exploded. "Tuffts was put to sleep in the first round and a hogshhead o' water wouldn't a-brought him to; he ain't awake yet!" which remark being interpreted, where found necessary, to mean that Tuffts had been "beat," had gone the rounds. The Ben Tewksburys returned with an air of triumph, but Mr. Tuffts, who had gone to the Junction in Daniel Tewksbury's wagon with Daniel, Mrs. Cutler and Priscilla, had returned home in a hired "fly." The same train bore almost everyone who had gone from the Corners on their return trip from Litchfield to Union Junction.

At the Junction there was a hurried exodus from the train and a rushing on the part of the men to secure their various "rigs" which had brought them from the Corners in the morning and had been left for the day.

Presently, Daniel drove up with his white nag. Her head was down, her mien dispirited. Did some sympathetic current charge the reins, communicating to the horse the despondency of its master?

Without a word being spoken, Mrs. Cutler and Priscilla got into the wagon and so they started homeward. They had not gone far upon their way when Ben Tewksbury's big bay team passed them going at a smart pace, throwing back a cloud of dust in their faces.

It was growing dark when they reached home. Daniel let Mrs. Cutler and Priscilla get out at the door and went on to the barn.

"Have you noticed, Ma? Uncle Dan'l hasn't spoken to us since the trial?"

"It's a bad sign, Priscilla — it's the wust kind of a sign *fer him*."

They went in and busied themselves getting ready some supper, speaking little. After a while Daniel came in. Seemingly he was not aware of their presence. He ate in sullen silence — then pushed back his chair — watching Priscilla and her mother as they cleared the table, washed the dishes and made things tidy. At last he spoke.

"You been tellin' folks how hard you had to work fer me?"

Mrs. Cutler stood still, trembling. "No, Dan'l, I ain't never said a word to nobody, one way or 'tother, 'bout workin'."

He turned his eyes of gloomy questioning upon Priscilla. "*You?*"

"No, Uncle Dan'l; what I do, I *do*, and I don't talk to anybody about it."

There was an ominous pause. Then Daniel got up. "*Somebody's* been talkin'," he said, slowly, with deliberate intention, as if unconvinced.

Then he went with sagging steps to his room. They heard his door shut with a heavy hand. It was as if he had flung a barrier between him and them.

"He's got the idee in his head that we been talkin'," Mrs. Cutler still trembled with nervous apprehension.

"And when he gets an idea in his head it stays there whether there's any truth in it or not," Priscilla answered indignantly. "Don't worry about it, Ma; he can't more than kill us."

Which remark seemed to have a really reviving effect upon Mrs. Cutler. "You're a ter'ble comfort to me, Priscilla," she said, in a tone of grateful relief. "I couldn't git along no how without ye."

CHAPTER XXVIII

PARENTAL MATCHMAKING

WHEN, in the course of two or three days, it became positively known that the first decision in Daniel Tewksbury's favor had been reversed and that Ben Tewksbury's claim to the ownership of the lane had been sustained, no one was surprised.

The Ben Tewksburys lost no time in making known their victory. Sid proclaimed it jubilantly in Tibbitts' store at mail time — as being the quickest and most effectual way of spreading the news.

"Well, I never did see sech a beatin' ez Tuffts got," said Mr. Tibbitts. "Fust off, at 'tother trial, he started in like a fightin' cock with all his fancy feathers set — a-dippin' his wing at 'tother rooster, but when that Lawyer Carpenter got through with 'im this time, Tuffts didn't hev so much as a pin feather left to stick his head under."

"It is to be hoped that your dear mother may now see her way clear to resume her place in our flock," interposed Parson Phelps with mild hopefulness.

"I don't know, I'm sure," Sid answered loftily. "You didn't take our part when we were put in the wrong and now that we are vindicated I don't see why we should overlook that." Sid went out, leaving Mr. Phelps bewildered and a little crestfallen.

"My, *ain't* they sot up now they've come off fust best?" said Mrs. Tibbitts.

Parson Phelps shook his head softly. "These experiences are sent to break our pride."

Mrs. Pettigrew laughed. "Mariar Tewksb'ry's pride 's got to hev consider'ble more settin' up 'n' knockin' down afore the'll be any denges in it wuth speakin' about."

Mrs. Tewksbury celebrated their victory by inviting Mr. and Mrs. Peabody to take tea with them. It proved a very pleasant occasion. Mr. and Mrs. Tewksbury were in high spirits, Mr. and Mrs. Peabody pleasantly elated. Sid was becomingly important. Mrs. Peabody thought she had never seen Sid appear to such advantage. He was so respectful to his father; so kind to his mother; so deferential to Mr. Peabody; so kind to herself; so delicate in his attentions to Emily.

Emily alone seemed subdued. She said very little, though that little was very pleasant. She had been agreeable to Sid, too, and after tea when he had asked her to go into the parlor and sing for him she had gone without hesitation. The sound of their young voices was borne pleasantly to the ears of their parents, adding to their satisfaction. The air was pregnant with the promise of realized hopes.

That night, as they were preparing to retire, Mrs. Peabody spoke — after a long reflective silence. “Emmy was real nice to Sid to-night. Did you notice it, Anson?”

“Of course. Didn’t I tell you she’d come round all right?”

“Now that the Ben Tewksburys have won the lawsuit, I’m anxious for Sid and Emily to come to an understanding.”

“Lane — ain’t worth — much.” Mr. Peabody punctuated his speech with long-drawn yawns.

“I know — as far as *money* goes, Anson; but the first verdict seemed to cast an aspersion on Sid’s family. Don’t you think so?”

Mr. Peabody’s heavy breathing was her only answer. Mrs. Peabody stepped to the bedside and gazed at her husband with a somewhat anxious expression. He had seemed to her, at times, not to be so well as he had always been. He was thinner — certainly he had grown thinner.

“I must have a talk with Emily to-morrow,” she said decisively, as she put out the light and slipped quietly into bed.

When Emily awoke the next morning it was with a feeling of oppression for which she could not at first account. With the complete arousing of her faculties came the realization that it was the reversal of the decision in the Ben Tewksbury's favor that was weighing upon her spirits. She knew that the success of Sid's parents had pleased her mother and father, and all through the previous evening she had been telepathically conscious that the idea of a marriage between her and Sid was strong in the minds of everyone present. She was subtly made aware that she was going to be urged more strongly than ever to yield to their wishes.

As Emily and Mrs. Peabody were seated at their sewing, later in the day, true to Emily's divination, her mother began: "Your father and I are very much pleased over Mr. Tewksbury winning the lawsuit. Of course your father and I always stood up for them, but the first decision seemed to place them in the wrong, in the minds of a good many people."

"I know it did," Emily murmured, feeling that she was expected to say something.

"But *now* they are completely vindicated," her mother went on. "It was shown so plainly how good they had been to the Cutler family. It really warmed my heart toward Mr. and Mrs. Ben Tewksbury. Of course I knew the Cutlers had lived with Mr. and Mrs. Ben for a long time after Mr. Cutler's death, but I never seemed exactly to realize all they had done for them until this trial came up."

"No," said Emily, sewing more diligently.

"I've been waiting to see how things were going to turn out before I said anything more to you about *Sid*; but *now* — I told your father last night — I must have a real serious talk with you."

Emily suddenly went all of a-tremble inside.

"I wish you wouldn't; it always makes me feel sick to talk about him."

"How foolish; a nice young man like Sid; he's good-looking, well-mannered, has been to college, and is getting along splendidly at the bank, so your father says — what

do you want more than that? Almost any girl would be glad to get Sid I should think."

"I suppose that's all so, mother, but I don't like Sid — I *can't* like him, somehow."

"That is just a silly idea you've got; most girls have their heads filled with foolish ideas."

Mrs. Peabody's tone was indulgent, superior, insistent. Emily began to feel like something trapped — fluttering feebly, desperately, but futilely against being drawn into capture. "If you were married to Sid," her mother went on, "you would like him just as every woman *should* like her husband."

"But why should I marry Sid? Why must I get married at all? I shall *never* get married," Emily burst out desperately.

Mrs. Peabody smiled indulgently. "That is the way girls always talk," she said.

"But I mean it, mother; anyway, I'd rather be an old maid forever than marry *Sid*."

Mrs. Peabody did not answer for an instant; when she did her manner was impressive in its gravity.

"I had thought that by this time you could listen to what was best for you and be reasonable about it."

"But why is it best for me to marry *Sid*? Isn't there anyone but Sid in the world?"

Her mother's gravity increased. "There are a great many besides Sid in the world and some of them just as good as Sid — maybe we'd be just as glad to have you marry one of them, if we knew who he was. Then there are others — that we couldn't and wouldn't hear to, even if you were favorably inclined, because we would know it was not for your good."

Something tightened about Emily's heart. Did her mother mean *Ned*? Of course she didn't expect to marry Ned for years and years — maybe never — if only her mother wouldn't keep on talking about her marrying somebody else.

"Mother," she said with sudden resolve, "I'm not think-

ing about getting married at all. What are you and father in such a hurry to get rid of me for?"

Mrs. Peabody laid down her sewing and turned upon Emily a serious face. "Emily, you are old enough now to have sense. You know your father and mother could plan only what was for your good. As for wanting to get rid of you," here Mrs. Peabody's voice trembled a little; "you know I told you once before that that is one reason we want you to marry Sid, so that we can keep you here with us."

"Then why can't you keep me just as I am, without being married at all?" Emily cried out convulsively.

"It is proper and best for a woman to marry — and right for her to marry the *best* man she can; and there is another reason. Oh, Emmy, your father isn't as well as he should be. Don't you see he's growing thin? I don't know what is the matter with him. I don't believe the doctor knows, exactly; but I know it will help him if you marry Sid, or even consent to an engagement. Your father will be sure then that your future is safely provided for — it will be a relief to his mind, and then, don't you see, with a son-in-law in the bank your father would be relieved of much responsibility. He would even feel that he might go away somewhere for his health. I haven't spoken of this before — I didn't want to worry you, but now it is time for you to know."

Tears trembled in Emily's eyes. "I didn't dream that anything was the matter with father," she said, faintly.

Mrs. Peabody wiped the tears from her own eyes. "Now that you do know it, Emmy,— know all the reasons why you ought to marry Sid — I hope you love your father well enough to consent, even if you think you don't love Sid well enough."

"We are talking like this, and Sid has never said a word to me about marrying him!" Emily was clinging to a last desperate straw of hope.

"He *will*, before long, I'm sure; and when he does I know you are going to make us all happy by accepting him.

You'll be happy, too, Emmy. I wouldn't want you to marry him if I didn't feel sure it was for your happiness too — though maybe you don't think so just now."

Emily felt as if she must scream out in hysterical weeping. A wild desire to run away — to run to Ned — to tell him all about it — to ask what she should do — what she *could* do — surged through her. Her mother's calm, convincing arguments — her parents' evident desire for her welfare according to *their* view — her mother's revelation of her father's failing health — the appeal to her love to help him — all this had come upon her with overwhelming force. She felt that they were going to marry her to Sid in spite of herself.

CHAPTER XXIX

MR. DICKSON APPEARS

ON the morning that Mrs. Peabody and Emily were having their talk in which Emily's acceptance of Sid Tewksbury was the main point of discussion, a stranger drove up to Daniel Tewksbury's and inquired if Mr. Tewksbury was at home.

"He ain't exactly to home," Mrs. Cutler had informed the man; "he's off some'eres in the fields workin'."

"I'd like to see him about something particular," the stranger urged. "If you could give me any idea whereabouts on the farm he's working I'd tie my horse here and go find him."

Mrs. Cutler hesitated. 'I d'know's he'd keer about havin' ye come," she said, "mebbe you're on'y goin' to pester him 'bout suthin'."

The man laughed pleasantly. "I think Mr. Tewksbury will be glad to see me when I tell him what brought me here," he said.

He was a well-looking man, a little shabby in his dress, but of a very persuasive and confidence-inspiring manner.

"Well," said Mrs. Cutler, with a lingering trace of reluctance, "I *did* hear Dan'l say suthin' 'bout the early peas needin' to be brushed up. I guess that's what he's a-doin'." The patch is over that way." She pointed off to the long, sunny stretch away over by the end of Lilac Lane. It's quite a consider'ble stretch."

The man's eyes followed her pointing finger. "Isn't there any way I could drive nearer?"

"You ust to could drive through the lane there," indicating the double row of lilac trees waving in the breeze; "but

I d'know; there's a sign up there now — 'private prop'ty, no tres-pasin'.' I d'know ez ye'd best go that way."

A faint smile played about the man's lips. "I can try it, anyway; thank you ma'am. Good morning."

Mrs. Cutler and Priscilla watched him as he drove along the lane.

"Whut ye s'pose he wants o' your Uncle Dan'l?"

"I don't know, Ma, but I wouldn't wonder if it was something about the trial. I'm pretty sure I saw him at the courthouse, and he spoke to Uncle Dan'l as we were all coming out."

Arrived at the end of the lane, the stranger saw Daniel putting in brush for the young pea vines to climb upon. Daniel just then stopped his work to observe the unwonted spectacle of a strange conveyance coming up the lane. The driver alighted, hitched his horse to a lilac tree and came over the field to Daniel.

"Good morning, Mr. Tewksbury," he said affably.

"Mornin'," Daniel replied warily.

"Well, that lawsuit went against you."

"I've heerd that a'ready." Daniel glowered at him.

"Of course it wasn't any surprise. It was almost a foregone conclusion that you'd get an adverse decision."

"You're the man spoke to me when I was comin' out o' the courthouse?"

"Yes, I'm a lawyer."

"You been hired by Ben Tewksb'ry t' come here 'n' rub it in t' me?"

"Not at all — I've never met your opponents; I came over on my own accord, just to have a talk with you."

Daniel gazed at him from under bent brows. He pushed some fine, long twigs into the earth at the roots of the pea vines nearest him. "*S-o?*"

"Is that the strip of ground in dispute?" The lawyer's eyes swept the length of the lane.

"Yes; 'n' it's mine by rights. They've made out it ain't, though." His tone was one of savage gloom.

"Well, are you going to accept the decision?"

The answer came slowly. "I ain't thought out yit *what* I'm going to do."

"What does your lawyer say?"

"Who? *Tuffts*? I ain't seen him. I ain't keerin' much *what* he says."

"Tuffts is a muttonhead — no match for Carpenter."

"He beat Carpenter fust time."

"By a fluke! That was when Tuffts struck twelve."

"You been to consider'ble onnecessary trouble 'n' expense comin' here to rap Tuffts. I guess mortification's 'bout set in with him as 'tis."

"Oh, I don't want to run Tuffts down, and if you intend to entrust your case to him any further, I haven't a word more to say; but I thought if you were going to make a change, I'd like to represent you."

Daniel gazed at the lawyer in a slow bewilderment. "*My case!* hev I got enny case left?"

"Well, I should say you have! You've got just as much case left as you had in the beginning; all you want is someone to go ahead who knows how to handle it."

A little gleam of interest brightened Daniel's eyes — not unobserved by his companion. "I allus knew I was in the right of it, but I didn't know jest how to go to work so's other folks'd see it that way."

"Exactly. Now what you want is some one who *can* make them see it and see it good and strong."

Daniel was warming. "Kin *you* do that?"

"If I didn't think I could, do you suppose I'd be wasting my time here? My time is valuable."

"How ye goin' to do it?"

"Mr. Tewksbury, a lawyer don't give opinions for nothing — they're his stock in trade — same as corn and potatoes are yours. All I can say under the circumstances is that you have grounds upon which to reopen the case if you wish to do so. The first move, of course, would be to appeal to the Supreme Court for another trial — the same as your brother did. *Should* the Supreme Court uphold

the trial Judge and refuse to grant it — there is still another way of getting your case reopened — but perhaps you'd prefer to retain Tuffts or some other lawyer, though if you *wish* to engage me for counsel, I'll be glad to act for you."

"Engagin' ye means payin' ye some money, I s'pose."

"That's customary, of course. But then, you're not obliged to retain *me* if you don't want to — you can get anyone you please. But I'd really enjoy seeing you get a square deal in the courts."

Dan'l was meditating. "How much you goin' to charge?"

"Well, under the circumstances, I'll be easy. I generally get two hundred for a retaining fee, but I'll split it for you. Yes, I'll take a hundred, and I'll advance all preliminary expenses out of it."

"The' ain't nothin' cheap 'bout you, that's sartin'."

"Oh, if you're looking for a cheap lawyer! May I ask what Tuffts charged you?"

"I ain't settled with Tuffts yit, but I guess he won't be very steep."

"Tuffts would be dear at any price. He lost you the suit. Well, I'll be going back; hope you'll find a *first class* lawyer who's willing to take your case cheaper than I can. *Good morning.*"

"Hold on; ye needn't git huffy. I ain't said I wouldn't hev ye — *yit*. I'll give ye fifty dollars."

"Couldn't think of it, Mr. Tewksbury; but I'll tell you what I'll do: I'll split the difference and take seventy-five. I don't know as I'd do that, only I know I'll bring you out a winner and I'd like to take a fall out of Carpenter on my own account. You can bet Carpenter got something big out of Ben Tewksbury — five hundred I heard. You're getting *my* services dirt cheap."

Daniel's eyes gleamed. "I guess if he kin afford a city lawyer I kin. I'll give you seventy-five dollars — what ye call it? — retainer's fee; but I'll hev to go to the bank fer it."

"I'll drive you down to the village in my rig — save you the trouble of hitching up. I tell you, Tewksbury, when we once get started we're going to make Carpenter and your brother Ben sit up and take notice of us."

At this point the faint jangle of a big bell was borne to their ears across the fields. "That's the bell fer dinner, Mr.—whut ye say your name is?"

The stranger drew forth a little book from his pocket, and extracting a card from it, handed it to Daniel. It bore the inscription "Luther V. Dickson, Attorney and Counselor at Law."

"Well, Mr. Dickson, you come in and hev somethin' to eat. Then I'll ride down with ye to the bank 'n' git the money."

Daniel's voice, his movements, his face, were growing in life and animation. It was as if an elixir of strength were being poured into his veins. He started to cross the fields.

"Here!" called Mr. Dickson; "where are you going? Why don't you ride to the house with me?"

"Oh, I d'know as I'd best do that; that sign down there —"

"Oh, that don't amount to anything; we'll get by all right; come on."

Mrs. Cutler's greeting as they came in was a little nervous and flurried.

"I'll hev the dinner right on the table, Dan'l; ye got here a little bit quicker'n I looked fer ye."

"Yes, I kem the *lane* way with this here gentleman."

"Dan'l, ye didn't never dast t' ride down the lane 'n' the sign put up 'n' all?"

"I *rid down the lane!*" Dan'l's tone was one of triumphant defiance. "This is Mr. Dickson," he said; "he's goin' to stay to dinner."

This was more than Daniel had vouchsafed at one time in the way of conversation since the trial. Delighted with so much affability, Mrs. Cutler flew about, making such additions to the dinner as she could, in honor of the guest. Nothing was said during the progress of the meal in re-

gard to the object of Mr. Dickson's visit. It was no part of Daniel's plan to let Mrs. Cutler or Priscilla know, for the present, at least, that he was going to renew the litigation over the lane; but he and Mr. Dickson were no sooner on their way than Daniel said—"Now, Mr. Dickson, I'd like to hev some idee of whut you purpose to do."

"The first thing to do is to make an appeal for a new trial. The court erred in instructing the jury—it fairly put the verdict into their mouths. It influenced and biased the judgment of the jury. It's on that that I'm going to claim a retrial. When I make the appeal for a new trial I'll get an order from the court restraining Ben Tewksbury from occupying the lane or making any use thereof while the case is pending."

This was very satisfactory to Daniel and very pleasing. The more Mr. Dickson talked the more pleased he became. By the time he reached the bank all qualms in regard to paying over the seventy-five dollars had subsided. He was willing—even anxious to give it to the lawyer; he was eager for the fight to begin again.

"I'm glad you kem down to see me, Mr. Dickson," he said. "If you hedn't, I s'pose I'd fooled 'round, not knowin' jest what I better do, till mebbe Ben 'ud a-got right into actyal possession."

"I'll put a crimp in him now," answered Mr. Dickson.

"Yes, you put jest as many crimps into 'im ez ye kin," urged Daniel, with much fervor.

CHAPTER XXX

STORMS BREWING

UPON taking his departure, Mr. Dickson had told Daniel that in three or four days he might look for a letter posting him as to the progress of events. He had constrained himself to wait until the fourth day before going to the post office—but now he could hold himself no longer. If Dickson was anything like as smart as he had made himself out to be he ought to have done something by this time, Daniel thought, as he hitched up to go to the Corners.

The old white horse was jogging along with nodding head, his nose seeming at every step to droop closer and closer to the ground. Dan'l on the seat behind seemed part and parcel of the horse, his own head down, nodding upon his breast, lost in some thought that bound him, looking to neither right nor left. But, apparently oblivious of all that was passing about him, his eyes took in Sid standing at Tibbitts' door, his head up, an inflated air of pride and insolence in his whole bearing as he looked on at "Dan'l's" approach.

Daniel passed on, at his slow, spiritless jog. "I'll wait till thet popinjay Sid's gone 'fore I see if the's a letter," he said to himself.

"Hello, Sid, that you? You're consider'ble late this arternoon, ain't ye?" was Mr. Tibbitts' greeting.

"Oh, a little; had some extra work to do. Any mail?"

"Well, suthin' fer yer pa; I d'know's it amounts t' much." Mr. Tibbitts was sorting out the letter, holding it up close to his eyes for inspection before passing it out to Sid. "Guess it's some advertisement; well, it'll be interestin' readin' fer yer pa over Sunday."

It was Sid's habit to go into Tibbitts' store every day when he came out of the bank to get the family mail, should there be any, before going home, and incidentally to hear anything in the way of news that might have come into Mr. Tibbitts' possession. Since the court decision had been rendered in his father's favor, Sid usually made his visit to the post office the occasion of uttering more or less disparaging remarks about his Uncle Daniel. Mr. Tibbitts, therefore, on this occasion, lost no time in bringing up what he knew would be a fruitful topic of conversation.

"S'pose ye seen yer Uncle Dan'l drivin' by jest now?"

"Yes, the old duffer."

"Seems to me he's lookin' kind-a droopy these days — kind-a simmered down 'n' agein' like."

"What else could you expect?" Sid replied with flip-pant arrogance. "He's spent a lot of money, and he's lost his case. He ought to have known better in the beginning than to think he had any right to any part of the lane; but some folks never know anything — unless it's beat into their heads with a hammer."

"Guess yer pa *did* give 'im a leetle too much law to chaw on; that las' verdick ain't never set good on his stummick, *thet's* sure."

"Well," Sid half yawned, with an affectation of indifference, "I'd better be starting home — got to walk — my wheel's out of order. I think a cigar will help me along. Got any decent ones? The last one I got here wasn't fit for pigs."

"What! them three fer five's? Well, most o' my customers like 'em fust rate; but I got in a new box day before yistidy — five apiece er three fer ten fer *pertickler* trade. Young fellers is gittin' extrav'gant these days; ust t' be thet pipe 'n' t'baccy was good enough fer ennybody 'cept milleanairs."

Sid indulged in far more expensive goods when away from home, but an occasional cigar bought of Tibbitts and spoken of as his "rare indulgence in the weed" was sup-

posed by those who knew him, at the Corners only, to be his sole habit of dissipation. "One for five or three for ten? That is going it strong, Tibbitts," he said with great ingenuousness. "What brand are they? Must be something pretty good."

Tibbitts opened the box and proudly displayed the ornate label. "It's the 'Calvee'; don't seem t' hev no last name er don't want folks t' know it. Ought to be pretty good with a picter like that, hedn't they? Folks say she's an op'ry pufformer down to Noo York. By hunk." Mr. Tibbitts lifted the box close to his face to gaze in cross-eyed admiration at the beauties displayed in the picture. "If these here seegars is half ez good ez she's good-lookin' they're hot stuff."

Sid, with one of the cigars between his lips, left the store with Tibbitts still lost in close range admiration of the beautiful presentment in six violent colors of the "op'ry pufformer."

It was apparent to Sid the moment he opened the side door leading into the dining-room, that something was the matter. The supper lay untasted upon the table, although it was past the usual time for that meal. Upon the snowy cloth was spread a paper of legal aspect, open, its edges turning up with evidences of a recent violent crunching.

His mother, her face red and perspiring, rocked violently in her chair, while his father excitedly paced the room, his hair pushed roughly up, his eyes flashing anger.

For just a fraction of time Sid went clammy. What was the row about? Could they have heard?—his thoughts flew to Millwell—to Tina—

His father's sudden outburst relieved the tension that held him.

"Whut ye think? Read this—the sheriff jest left it!" Ben burst out. "That dum-fool Dan'l ain't hed enough—he's goin' t' 'peal S'preme Court fer another trial! 'N' I was goin' t' start ploughin' up that lane 'n' cuttin' down them trees t'-morrer!"

"What on airth excuse kin Dan'l Tewksb'ry git up fer hevin' another trial?" wept Mrs. Tewksbury; "'n' what good is verdicks er law either, er lawyers, fer the matter o' that, if ye never know after ye've won a soot whether ye actchelly *hev* won it er whether ye hev'n't? The' don't seem to be never no end on't!"

She fanned her heated face and wiped it in great agitation with her ample apron.

Sid read the paper with care. "I suppose there's nothing to do but to keep on fighting him," he said.

"Keep on fightin', o' course! All ye kin do with an obst'nate idjit 'at don't know when he's licked is to keep on a downin' him! but d'ye know how much it's cost me up to now? It's cost me putty nigh a thousand dollars, 'n' the Lord on'y knows how much more it'll cost."

"Well, we'll hev to spend it if it's necess'ry," wailed Mrs. Ben. "We got him where he belongs 'n' we got to *keep* him there no matter *whut* it costs."

"I'll go to Litchfield to-morrow 'n' see Carpenter. If he ain't smart enough t' git this thing *settled* fer us fer good 'n' all I'll find somebody that *kin*."

Mrs. Tewksbury was drying her eyes and making an effort to return to the usual routine of living.

"Come, Ben," she said. "Now Sid's here, I s'pose we may as well set down 'n' try t' eat suthin'; but I d'know who could relish supper after sech an upsot as *this*."

CHAPTER XXXI

A STORM BREAKS

UPON this same evening Priscilla and her mother worked among the flowers until they could no longer tell weeds from plants; then they had gone up on the little front porch to wait for Daniel's return.

For a long time the two women sat in silence. Then Mrs. Cutler spoke, in a hushed voice. "Priscilla, your pa seems awful near to-night; he ain't seemed so near fer a long spell."

The whispering of the flower-scented breeze was the only answer. Priscilla, sitting on the porch step, her hands clasped about her knees, gazed out and upward at one dim, solitary star beginning to show in the heavens. After another long silence, Mrs. Cutler spoke again. "I wisht I could see Ned, Priscilla. I didn't think I could ever git on so long 'thout seein' him."

"We'll see him some day, Ma," Priscilla answered slowly, her eyes fixed upon the distant star, growing brighter as the sky darkened.

Ned's affairs were in a very disheartening condition at this time. His mother's plan for him to spend the winter in studying had been carried out and, by the Judge's advice, he had gone to the Polytechnic School in T——. Ned had calculated that with what money he had saved and what he might be able to earn doing "odd jobs" he could get through the probable three months' "lay off." The course of study had, however, proved so exacting that to give time or attention to outside work had been impossible. Worst of all, with the coming of spring the trolley line lay dormant. It was May now — and no definite prospect of its construction being resumed. Some time

in March the Judge had made Ned a flying visit and had pressed a hundred dollars upon him.

"Take it, my boy, take it," the Judge had insisted. "You'll need it—you can pay me back after you get started again."

And Ned had needed it—he had used a good deal of it—and still the trolley line showed no sign of life.

"I don't know but I've been foolish to wait so long," Ned had written in his last letter. "Of course I've been learning something all the time, and I thought it would be better for me to go back where I'd made a start and where the engineer was such a friend to me. But I can't wait any longer—I've got to hustle now for another place."

Priscilla was thinking this all over as she watched the far star, growing bigger as the evening waned.

Presently there was a soft noise of wheels on the dirt road.

"I guess that's Uncle Dan'l," said Priscilla, getting to her feet.

Daniel drove in. He did not speak as he went past the two women, going to the barn.

"Why can't he *say* suthin'," Mrs. Cutler whispered plaintively. "Seems sometimes 's if I couldn't *stan'* it—him goin' 'roun 'thout *sayin'* suthin' to us."

"There now, Ma, don't get worked up about *that*. It's better than to have him saying things we maybe wouldn't like to hear."

In the barn, after unhitching the horse, Daniel pored eagerly over a letter by the light of his lantern.

On the whole, he was pleased with its contents. Mr. Dickson had appealed to the Supreme Court to grant a rehearing of the case. The appeal would be argued the last week in June, and Ben Tewksbury had been notified of the procedure. He had also applied for an order forbidding Ben to take possession of the lane, or to make any use of it prior to the hearing.

This was very satisfactory—the balance of the letter was not so pleasing. Mr. Dickson went on to state

that his expenses had been unexpectedly heavy, owing to his desire to get immediate results for his client. "You know," he wrote, "there are always ways of pushing things ahead, if you have a little money to spend." It would really be necessary for him to have another fifty dollars in order to go ahead with the case.

Daniel pondered. At last he muttered to himself: "Guess I'll hev to let him hev it—he does seem to be gittin' things along pretty fast—considerin' what the courts be." His lips set in a grim smile as he pictured the consternation of the Ben Tewksbury family when notice of this renewal of warfare was hurled, bomb-like, into their midst. He closed the barn presently and came out to the porch where the women were still sitting. After resting for awhile in his big wooden chair he said:

"Guess you folks must a-noticed 't I been goin' threw the lane same's I ust to."

Mrs. Cutler answered with timid hesitancy: "Well, yes, Dan'l, we *hed* noticed it."

"Sort o' queer you ain't *said* nothin' 'bout it."

It was Priscilla who answered, with a slight touch of impatience. "We thought that if you wanted it spoken of, Uncle Dan'l, you would say something about it yourself."

"Huh," was Daniel's sole reply, delivered as a non-committal growl.

"We *was* wonderin' how you dast to do it, Dan'l." Mrs. Cutler's tone was conciliatory. She had quaked at Priscilla's temerity.

"Well, I guess Ben Tewksb'ry's found out by this time 't he ain't got no more call to put up 'Keep off'n the grass' signs 'n' I hev. I got a letter to that effect to-night, f'm Mr. Dickson."

"F'm Mr. Dickson, Dan'l?"

"Mr. Dickson is a *lawyer*."

"A *lawyer*?"

"*My* lawyer."

"Oh, Dan'l—"

"Ben Tewksb'ry'll find out he ain't got sech a easy walk-over ez he thought he hed. The's more sma't lawyers to be hed 'n' Carpenter an' Gammell."

"Oh, *Dan'l*—" Mrs. Cutler's tightly twisted hands were working nervously one over the other.

Daniel turned toward her suddenly. "Whut ye 'Oh *Dan'l*-in' me like *that* fur?"

"I thought the' wan't goin' to be no more lawin'—"

"Oh, *did* ye? Ye thought I was goin' to set down quiet 'n' let Ben 'n' Mariar Tewksb'ry wipe ther shoes on me? Mebbe ye'd like to see 'em do it?"

"Oh, *Dan'l*—"

"Why didn't ye try t' git *them* t' quit when the law give the lane to *me*?"

"*Dan'l*—"

"You know, Uncle *Dan'l*, that Ma never sees Uncle Ben's folks to talk to them; besides, their lawyer appealed the case before we left the court room. You oughtn't to pitch onto ma about that."

"No, *Dan'l*," Mrs. Cutler broke in eagerly; "I ain't favorin' Ben more'n I am you. I couldn't never see why you boys wuz quarrelin' about the lane; seems to me you might a-let it stay jest as it's allus been and both of ye use it peaceable like."

"Didn't Ben try to take it f'm me in the fust place? Ain't I got ez much right t' my hunderd 'n' twenty acres as *he* hez?"

"Yes, but *Dan'l*—"

"But ye want me t' give up to him *now*?"

"Ye ain't sure o' nothin' when ye're lawin', *Dan'l*. Ye ain't sure 't Mr. Dickson kin beat Mr. Carpenter, 'n' yer spendin' yer money, *Dan'l*, 'n' yer time, 'n' gittin' yer-self all worked up, 'n' like as not Ben'd bring up suthin' ye wan't expectin', 'n' ye'd lose the case agin 'n' hev more costs 'n' ever t' pay—"

Encouraged by Daniel's silence, the darkness hiding from her the growing wrath glowering in his eyes, Mrs. Cutler gained spirit for an unusual freedom of expression. She

was pressing on zealously with her argument when he, in rising passion, interrupted her.

"I guess you don't need to say no more. You been denyin' it, o' course; but I kin see now plain enough that yer sidin' with Ben —"

"Dan'l —"

"Uncle Dan'l, you haven't any right to say that — nor to think it." Priscilla was on her feet, pale with indignation.

"I got a right t' say what I please in my own house — 'specially when I'm speakin' the trewth. Yer Ma's a-talkin' fer me to give up to Ben; that means she wants him t' hev the land — 'n' *me* t' knuckle under to 'im —"

"Oh, Dan'l —"

"She means," Priscilla protested hotly, "that it's time you and Uncle Ben both stopped wrangling over a few feet of land and wasting your money in the courts."

"Oh! *that's* what she means, eh? I notice she hes a lot to say about stoppin' *when the advantage is onto Ben's side.*" Daniel was on his feet now, with each word lashing himself to greater anger. 'N' who *give* him that advantage? 'Twas *you 'n' yer ma* a-tellin' *how hard ye'd worked fer me.* Me, that took ye 'n' give ye a home 'n' keered fer ye; 'n' fer that ingrate uv a Ned, that soon's he got so he was wuth suthin', turned on me 'n' left me; 'n' now *you're* argyin' fer Ben t' keep the lane. How do I know but whut yer in a plot agin me?"

"Oh, Dan'l —"

"Ye'll hev to say consid'able more'n 'Oh, Dan'l' t' git on the right side o' *me* agin', 'n' pull the wool over my eyes. Ye kin go t' the one yer stickin' up fer — both uv ye; ye've done all ye could to help *him* — now ye kin go 'n' see how much he'll do fer *you*; ye needn't work fer me another minute!" He was going into the house — at the door he turned. "Ye kin send fer yer clo'es — the clo'es I've paid fer, 'n' give ye. Ye'll find 'em done up 'n' set out here on the porch ready fer ye!" He went in, leaving

the astonished women gazing blankly at the door he had shut and locked between them.

A moment after they heard the bolt shot on the inside of the kitchen door, and then more faintly, on the door of the wood shed.

"He's locked us out o' doors, Priscilla!"

"Well, of all the unreasonable things I ever heard of!" exclaimed Priscilla, when she had recovered enough from her amazement to speak. "Uncle Dan'l must be going crazy."

"I believe he *is*, Priscilla; I sort o' feel 's if I was goin' crazy myself. I don't know whatever we're goin' to do now."

"We're going to do just what he told us to do, Ma; we're going to Uncle Ben's."

"Oh, I wisht we could go to Ned—"

"But we can't; not yet. Ned would have to work at anything he could get if he had to take care of us."

"I don't want to do *that*; we mustn't hender Ned f'm gittin' a start. Mebbe if we stayed 'round here—couldn't we sleep out to the barn, Priscilla? In the mornin' Dan'l'll think better of it, mebbe—"

"Maybe he will, and maybe he *won't*; anyway, we're not going to wait around here all night. Come, Ma, we'll go right over to Uncle Ben's. It's on his account Uncle Dan'l's turned us out, and he's *got* to take us in."

Priscilla had wrapped a little knitted shawl that was lying on one of the chairs about her mother's head and shoulders and was steadying her trembling form as they went down the steps.

"I ortn't to a-said anything to Dan'l," Mrs. Cutler mourned; "I wisht some times 't I was deef 'n' dumb—"

As they went out of the gate the wind blew the breath of the flowers to them.

"The posies'll miss us, Priscilla—"

The two lonely forms went on in the darkness . . . the soft night breezes embraced them . . . the stars

came out one by one to light them dimly on their way. The big house which had once been their own, at last loomed before them . . . a mausoleum in which lay buried so much of what had been their life . . . their joys . . . their hopes.

The house was closed and dark, except for a few rays of light struggling from behind the shades of the sitting-room windows.

"They haven't gone to bed yet," said Priscilla.

Mrs. Cutler was shaking violently from excitement and weakness. "Suppose they won't let us come in?"

Priscilla knocked at the side door. There were sounds as of a little flurry inside the room; then Mrs. Ben's voice demanding, "Who's there?"

"It's Ma and me, Aunt Maria," answered Priscilla.

The door opened and Mrs. Ben, partly disrobed for the night, faced them in astonishment.

"Well, fer mercy sakes!" she ejaculated. "Ben — Ben! what ye think — here's Marthy Cutler 'n' Priscilla."

"Uncle Dan'l has turned us out and we've come here," said Priscilla simply.

"Fer goodness sake, Ben, d'ye hear that? Hurry up 'n' come out here."

To Ben and Maria, Priscilla gave a concise account of what had taken place. "We didn't know where else to go," Priscilla concluded. "We thought that as he's turned us out on your account you'd let us come here, for a while anyway."

"Ye kin come, of course," said Mrs. Ben, with surprising cordiality. "It can't never be said that me 'n' Ben ever treated ye onkindly. Stay 'n' welcome."

"Thank ye, Mariar," faltered Mrs. Cutler.

"Thank you and Uncle Ben, too," said Priscilla.

"I'll git ye a lamp." Mrs. Tewksbury was bustling about — "'n' ye kin go right t' yer old room; I guess ye ain't fergot yer way 'round the house."

"No, Mariar;" there was a choking in Mrs. Cutler's

throat and a quaver in her voice, "I don't think I could ever fergit that."

"The's jest one thing." Mrs. Ben paused with this afterthought. She became righteously stern. "I say *you* kin hev a home here, both of ye, but I can't never hev that boy Ned comin' back here like a bad penny 'n' settin' an example o' improper conduct before my Sid. I don't want nothin' o' *that* sort 'round here."

Mrs. Cutler's lips were trembling; they could form no words.

"We promise you, Aunt Maria, Ned will never come here," said Priscilla quietly.

Taking the lighted lamp from Mrs. Ben she turned to her mother. "Come, Ma, we'll go to bed. Good night, Aunt Maria; good night, Uncle Ben."

"Well, if Dan'l Tewksb'ry ain't the fool!" exclaimed Mrs. Ben, as she and her husband were left alone. "He's jest put a weepin' into our hands, a-turnin' them out o' house 'n' home 'n' us takin' 'em in!"

CHAPTER XXXII

RETURN WRECKAGE

As Mrs. Ben had divined, Daniel's outburst against Mrs. Cutler and Priscilla had, in the minds of Columbia Cornerites at least, worked to his disadvantage. That he had been "darned mean," was the sentiment that had swept the town when the facts became known, and the Ben Tewksburys were openly spoken of as having done the "square thing" by taking them into their house.

Mrs. Cutler and Priscilla were treated with a consideration as surprising to them as it was pleasant. At night in their room, they talked over the situation, often, in cautious whispers.

"Mariar's ter'ble nice to us, ain't she, Priscilla? I most think we didn't ust to onderstand her." And Priscilla, not wishing to disturb her mother's comfort by casting any doubts upon Mrs. Ben's motives, would answer noncommittally, "Maybe we didn't, Ma."

And at night in their room, Maria and Ben, also in cautious tones, would speak of Mrs. Cutler and Priscilla.

"It's all over everywhere 'bout Dan'l turnin' 'em out, and us takin' 'em in; an' folks thinkin' a heap of us fer doin' it — just's I told you 'twould be," Maria would repeat every night, with the regularity of a bedtime prayer.

"If it'll help win the law case we kin afford to keep 'em," Ben would as regularly answer.

"Course it'll help," Mrs. Ben would reassert. "Wasn't it just on that point o' Dan'l takin' care of 'em that he got the fust judgment? 'N' fer the same reason didn't *we* git the verdick? 'n' now his turnin' 'em out jest when he's startin' another soot — 'n' us takin' 'em in 'n' bein' nice to 'em — why! it'll jest fix *Dan'l* fer good 'n' all."

So for the first time since Mrs. Cutler had put away from earthly sight her unbusiness-like, but always indulgent and tender husband, she felt the warmth and cheer of being treated as if she had a place of some consideration in the household. She helped gladly about the work and Priscilla was industrious with her needle for Mrs. Tewksbury's benefit. Aside from the annoying anxiety over the lawsuit, things were extremely pleasant in the Ben Tewksbury home.

Daniel Tewksbury could not well help feeling that for *him* the wind of public opinion was blowing from the north, and it may have been this that froze him into glum unsociability.

He lived alone now at the farm. After Mrs. Cutler and Priscilla had been turned out of the house he had shut the wooden blinds over every window in the front of the house. Excepting the kitchen, where he cooked his food after such fashion as he could, and the room where he slept — the house was unused, silent, dark and dreary. He withdrew more and more within himself, seeking no companionship. Such times as he drove into the village he spoke to no one more than the barest words necessary to transact his business. Towards Lawyer Tuffts' he never even looked. He was known no more at the Putnam House, and at Tibbitts' Emporium and post office his few purchases were made laconically and his occasional mail received in glum, repellent silence.

This line of conduct was more than Mr. Tibbitts — that disciple of volubility who practised his beliefs — could at all times bear. On more than one occasion he attempted to penetrate Daniel's reserve. He drew upon all the eloquence at his command in discoursing upon the state of the weather; he wanted to know if Dan'l had in all his experience ever seen "sich up 'n' down weather!"

To which Dan'l, after a short pause, had replied uninterestedly, "D'know's I hev."

Mr. Tibbitts went on with great show of affability, "D'know f'm one day t' the next whether yer goin' 'round

in s'penders er whether ye got t' put on gre't co't 'n' muffer."

To this Dan'l had not seemed to think any reply necessary.

Again had Tibbitts, with much show of cordial interest, told him: "Now Mis' Tibbitts hes got a fust-class cook-book 'n' ye kin hev the loan of it jest ez well ez not if ye hev any trouble cookin' yer own fodder."

Daniel opined that he "guessed he could git along without it."

Whereupon Tibbitts gaily sought to wring further comment, or perhaps a smile, by relating how "old man Goslin was drivin' past Widda Lunn's ev'ry chanst he got — not darin' to go in — 'n' Mis' Lunn 'ud stan' at the winder 'n' throw kisses to him as he went by."

Which item of home news "Dan'l" received gravely, without comment.

Tibbitts, relating these futile experiments, would declare that "ye might 's well try to git int'mate with a porkypine ez with Dan'l Tewksb'ry."

The last week in June, as had been expected, the hearing in the Supreme Court took place. Both brothers were in attendance, their respective claims being represented by their lawyers, Mr. Carpenter and Mr. Dickson.

The Supreme Court affirmed the judgment of the lower court.

The blow fell like a thunderbolt upon Daniel, but Mr. Dickson took possession of him immediately after the dismissal of the case.

"You're knocked out," he said; "why, this isn't any more than I thought might happen!"

"It ain't?" said Daniel, with a faint glimmer of returning hope. "I don't see what ye kin do now —"

"You're not expected to see, that's my part of it," Mr. Dickson answered with cheering confidence. "I shall at once bring suit on the *Chancery* side of the court to recover possession of the lane — that is, of course, if you want to do it."

"You kin start that kind of a suit?"

"Why, certainly. I've been prepared for it all the time, *in case* this appeal fell down."

"Then start ahead," said Dan'l. "I'll go to the end o' my rope."

The Ben Tewksburys did not enjoy their second victory very long. They were notified shortly of the starting by Daniel of the suit in Chancery, and it was soon known throughout the Corners.

"By ginger! Dan'l Tewksb'ry hangs on like a bulldog, don't he? Wouldn't wonder if he'd come out top o' the heap arter all," Elnathan Tibbitts repeated at convenient periods to his customers.

On one of these occasions Mrs. Pettigrew, being present, responded in her usual cheerful vein with its running accompaniment of pleased chuckles "The *diffick* wilty seems to be a-stayin' on top. Fust the'r up 'n' then the'r down; it's a reg'lar seesaw. Fust thing ye know one of 'em's li'ble t' fall off 'n' let tother one down hard, 'n' if the' ain't suthin' wuss 'n broken bones I miss *my* guess."

"Yes—jesso—jesso," nodded "old man" Goslin. "Lawyers is a leetle might expensive orn'ments fer a family to keep on hand stiddy, ain't they? Yes—jesso—jesso."

"Well," assented Mr. Tibbitts, "I guess the' don't none on 'em calk'late t' hev t' eat grass."

Although the suit in Chancery was started in early June, its consideration was put off for one reason and another so that the spring term of court closed without the case having been reached. It *might* be considered at the beginning of the fall term, no one knew just when it would be brought up. By this time the contestants had become somewhat used to the law's delays, but the strain of the long drawn-out litigation was beginning to have its effect on both men. Dan'l was growing more and more drawn and wiry. The furrows in his face had deepened, the jaws were more grimly set. He drew more within him-

self; he now scarcely spoke to or looked at anyone. He had spent a great deal of money. All that he had had laid by in the bank — it was not a great deal — had been consumed. He had borrowed money several times from Judge Witherspoon in "notes," but had finally been obliged to put a mortgage on the farm to liquidate them and have something in the bank to draw upon. The Judge had loaned the money and taken the mortgage at Daniel's solicitation, making no comment, but he divined the reasons for his being in money straits.

That money was now nearly gone, and his lawyer, Mr. Dickson, was still sending for sums of various size to meet some "unexpected" expense.

As Daniel grew more taciturn under all this pressure, Ben became weakly garrulous. On all occasions, wherever he could find a listener, he went over again the suits at law. His mind dwelt upon the subject to the exclusion of everything else. His flesh had grown flabby; his muscles wasted; his nerves rasped and shaken.

"Ben's gittin' so nervous over these here lawsoots! I jest expect he'll fly off the handle any minute. That Dan'l Tewksb'y'll hev an awful lot to answer fer," Mrs. Ben would say, with direful shakings of the head, over and over to her sympathetic friends, especially to the Peabodys, who were becoming daily more anxious that an engagement, at least, should exist between Sid and Emily.

Mr. Peabody felt himself growing less able to take an active share in the work of the bank. If Sid were his son-in-law, or even a prospective one, he would feel secure in increasing the young man's responsibility, and so relieving himself.

They were pressing Emily, and Emily was growing dispirited and losing her pretty color. Sid himself had been more than usually urgent.

He was rather relieved, than otherwise, that there was no immediate prospect of a *marriage* with Emily, but an engagement would have pleased him very well.

It would secure his position in the Corners, and the

entire surrounding country. Wherever Ned Cutler was, he would hear of it from his mother or Priscilla, and that thought also gave Sid great satisfaction. An engagement would make things altogether easier about Tina, too. She was inclined to hang on a little bit tighter than he had thought she would, but she was lively and volatile, and, after a while, if he lagged a little in his attentions, she would take up with someone else and he could slip quietly out of the whole thing by the time Emily was willing to marry him.

These, and similar speculations, quite unknown to the Peabodys, or any of the Ben Tewksbury household, were making life complex and interesting to Sid.

Not long after Ned had written to Priscilla that, unless work was soon resumed upon the trolley line, he would look for something to do elsewhere, he had received a letter from Mr. Harkiss, which revived his hopes and sent his spirits, of late at rather low pitch, soaring skyward. Mr. Harkiss had been engaged to make the survey for and superintend the constructing of an important railroad extension. He had secured the position of transit man for Ned, with a possibility of promotion to assistant second engineer.

It was not until they had received this word of his good fortune that Priscilla wrote him of their change of habitation. She softened, as much as possible, the manner of their dismissal from their Uncle Dan'l's house, and dwelt at length upon Mrs. Ben's remarkably kind reception of them. "We were forced to promise, though," Priscilla wrote, "that *you* would not come back to live with them. We gave the promise very readily, because we knew, Ned, that wild horses couldn't drag you back again."

To which Ned had answered with despatch, "You're right, Priscilla, you won't catch me going back to the Corners till I'm independent. I'm going to pay Judge Witherspoon the money he lent me just as soon as I can, out of the first money I earn. Don't you think I ought to?"

But by spring I'll have some money saved. If you and mother can get through the winter at Uncle Ben's, when spring comes we'll get a little house somewhere, or some rooms, and you and Ma can keep house. I guess by that time I'll be going strong enough to pay the rent and the grocery bills."

" 'N' we needn't eat much, you 'n' me; we kin make the bills awful little," Mrs. Cutler had said, a subdued happiness suffusing her whole being at this part of the letter. "Won't it be beautiful, Priscilla, if we kin hev a home of *our own* agin?"

"Yes," Priscilla assented fervently, "but we mustn't think too much about it. We don't know what may come up, and Ned isn't far enough along yet to be very sure about what he's going to earn."

CHAPTER XXXIII

DOUBTFUL SAILING

It was not until the first week in November that the Court in Chancery handed down its decision in the Tewksbury Lane Case. It was for an equal division of the lane between the contesting parties.

Daniel was displeased with the decision. He was also disappointed in Mr. Dickson. The lawyer had promised a great deal. Daniel angrily thought that he had promised too much and performed too little, but he said nothing, except to Mr. Dickson himself.

To him he expressed himself freely, and the lawyer had responded, "I don't see that you've got any right to complain; you'd lost it all and I've got half of it back for you. Half a loaf's better than none, isn't it?"

"Not when ye pay the price o' two er three *hull* loaves," was the grim retort.

"Of course, if the land isn't worth the cost of litigation that isn't *my* fault," Mr. Dickson answered.

"Mebbe not," said Dan'l. "Anyhow, I won't hev any further need o' your services. I guess I don't owe ye nothin'."

Mr. Dickson faced round upon Daniel in indignant surprise.

"Not owe me anything! You don't suppose I've been conducting this suit for love, do you?"

"You've got a pretty good lot o' money out o' me f'm fust to last; I s'posed ye got enough t' pay ye!"

"I got my retaining fee, about everything else was, as I told you when I wrote for it, for expenses incurred. I've got my bill made out here." Mr. Dickson turned to his desk and took from it a neatly folded paper with a neatly

made out account. "I've credited you with my fee, twenty-five dollars personally used out of what I have had since; some additional expenses occurring during the trial just past I've charged up, and the balance is due for my services." He passed the bill over to Daniel, who accepted it mechanically and looked it over in consternation. He was debtor to Mr. Dickson just four hundred and thirty-five dollars.

"I won't pay it!" he burst out angrily. "Yer tryin' t' skin me. I won't pay ye another cent."

The lawyer settled back in his chair. "I'm not worryin' about that," he answered smoothly. "You can pay me or fight me. You're good for it; I guess I can collect."

Daniel was bewildered. The wages of the law were beginning to affright him. He was sickening at the thought of courts and legal processes. The idea of a possible contest with Mr. Dickson unnerved him. By this time he had become aware of the dubious reputation of Mr. Dickson, but for that very reason he was afraid of him. Dickson was "crooked"; he was "tricky," and, therefore, all the more to be feared.

Daniel felt that he couldn't cope with him; he began to count the cost in money, time, and worry, of a suit with the lawyer. If he could consult Judge Witherspoon — but he remembered what the Justice had said, long back, when he first went to him about the lane. No, he couldn't go to the Judge now for advice; besides, he wouldn't want him to know how he had been "buncoed."

But, out of his recalling of that, at the time unpalatable interview one word leaped out in his memory and brought a ray of hope. "Compromise!" Daniel remembered that word and how its utterance by the Judge had roused in him greater anger and obstinacy; but now it flashed to mind like a beacon light of hope. With an effort he controlled himself and turned toward Dickson in a conciliatory manner. "I don't know as it 'ud pay either of us t' fight," he said, "but I think you suttinly air steep in yer price. Can't we git down to a compermise?"

Although Daniel did not mistrust it, a compromise was just what Mr. Dickson had prepared for.

He had felt pretty sure that no matter what claim he might put in for services, Daniel would demur, so he had made it an exorbitant one in the expectation of splitting it. He was no more anxious to bring it to a suit than his client was, being aware that his handling of the money already received would scarcely bear examination. He accepted Daniel's suggestion with apparent reluctance, though accompanied by signs of possible softening.

"I don't see just why I should cut down the price of my services; but if you feel that you're overcharged I'm willing to yield a little something; I'll make it an even four hundred."

"Mebbe ye kem down fur enough t' hurt *you*, but *I* don't feel it any," Daniel responded drily.

"How much would you expect me to come down?" Mr. Dickson had cornered Daniel just where he wanted him. Daniel hesitated. "If Dickson had proposed taking off only thirty-five dollars he wouldn't likely stand for too big a cut," he argued to himself.

"I thought three hunderd," he said finally.

The lawyer jumped to his feet in well-assumed indignation. "Three hundred! What kind of a cheap Jack do you take me for? That wouldn't pay for the shoe leather I've worn out; but I want to get done haggling over it — I'll call it three hundred and fifty."

"Three hunderd 's all I'll give ye — ye ought t' be glad t' git that —"

"No — no; three fifty is the best I can do."

Daniel made one more effort. "I'll split the difference — I'll give ye three twenty-five."

Mr. Dickson hesitated a second, then, as if yielding the point out of sheer weariness and disgust at such small dealings, "Oh, well, make it three twenty-five, though that don't pay me for my time and trouble."

"I ain't got it with me. I'll send it to ye in a few days,"

said Daniel, congratulating himself on having done pretty well in getting a hundred and ten dollars off Dickson's bill.

"All right, Mr. Tewksbury, but I'd like it as soon as possible; you know you've cut me down to small profits that demand quick returns," Mr. Dickson had answered, inwardly jubilant over the fact that he had made about two hundred dollars more than any court would have allowed him or than he had really expected to get out of Daniel.

The following morning Daniel sought Judge Witherspoon in his office. The Justice was bland and smiling, and greeted him with an affable "Mornin', Dan'l. Feelin' pretty brisk to-day?"

Daniel stood with his back to the roaring stove, his hands joined behind him, rubbing them slowly one over the other. "Not perticklerly." His voice was strained. He looked pinched and worn.

"I'm s'prised at that—I expected ye'd be pretty nigh standin' on yer head for joy! Why, I heard Court has decided that you're entitled to half the lane!" The merry twinkle in the Judge's eye was softened by his visitor's forlorn aspect.

"Yes, I git half of it," Daniel echoed, with no sign of enthusiasm.

"Well, I guess that shyster Dickson done as much for you as any one could, if he didn't sock it to you too heavy in the region of the pocketbook."

Daniel set his teeth. "I ain't complainin'."

The Judge began to drum on his desk and whistle softly under his breath, as if conversationally exhausted. Daniel fidgeted from one foot to the other and slapped his hands one against the other nervously. After a moment's embarrassed pause, he went on:

"Speakin' about pocketbooks jest reminds me. I'd like to git a little more money f'm ye."

There was quick comprehension in the look the Judge fixed upon Daniel. There was a certain sympathy, too, mixed with impatience. "More money? Don't forget that

fifteen-hundred-dollar mortgage you've got now. You know it's easier to borrow than to pay — ain't the' any way you can git along without encumberin' yerself with more debt?"

"I *got to hev* three hunderd and twenty-five dollars. Ye kin make out a second morgidge fer it. The farm's good security fer eighteen hunderd 'n' twenty-five dollars. I guess you don't need to worry enny time I ain't able to keep up the int'rest."

"Oh, I ain't worryin' if *you* ain't." The Judge had responded. "When do you want the money?"

"Soon's I kin git it."

"All right, come in to-morrow morning. I'll have the mortgage made out and the money ready for ye."

As Daniel drove dejectedly away, the Judge, looking after him, said to himself, "I'll bet Dickson stuck him good — but he's pretty game, he won't let on."

That very afternoon Ben and Maria Tewksbury paid a visit to Judge Witherspoon. Unlike Daniel, they were freely communicative.

"We kem in, Jedge," Ben had at once broken forth, after the ordinary salutation, "t' see if we could git ye to lend us a little more money."

"Money? Why, are you in need of more money, Ben? I thought you were going to pay off some on that mortgage, now Sid's getting along so well."

"It's this dum lawin' that's doin' it! It's money here 'n' money there 'n' money all the time; the flesh is jest droppin' f'm my bones watchin' the money goin' out like water —"

Ben being started would have gone on indefinitely, but Mrs. Ben interrupted in tearful tones: "We've jest *hed* t' do it though, t' keep that Dan'l Tewksb'ry f'm ridin' over us."

"Yes, 'n' with all the rest of 't hevin' sech a big fambly t' pervide fer —"

Ben was beginning garrulously again.

"Mis' Cutler 'n' her daughter?" the Judge broke in to ask, "cost much t' feed 'em?"

"It costs somethin' to feed *enny* one."

Mrs. Ben was plaintive. "Here we've kep' Marthy 'n' Priscilla all these months, 'n' I don't see 's it done us *enny* great good when the trial kem off."

The Judge rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "U-m-m! — the bread ye cast on the waves got sort o' water-logged 'n' went down — didn't come back egzackly as ye thought 't would?"

"They got good appetites, they kin allus eat, they ain't got lawsoots to worry 'em 'n' money goin' out hand over fist — 'n' some'un tryin' t' take away whut b'longs to 'em — with motions, 'n' 'peals 'n' Chanc'ry Courts. Who ever heerd o' Chanc'ry Court till Dan'l Tewksb'ry . . . 'n' now we got 'em on our hands, 'n' goodness knows when we'll ever get red of 'em —"

Mrs. Ben cut into her husband's maunderings. "That Ned Cutler ain't good fer shucks er he'd be earnin' a livin' fer 'em by this time."

The Judge, tilted back in his chair, had calmly listened to Mrs. Ben's tirade.

"You needin' this money, Ben says you come for, t' spend on Mis' Cutler 'n' Priscilla?"

"We was most fergittin' about the money, wan't we, Mariar?"

"I wan't fergittin' it, Ben; I was comin' to it right off."

"We're wantin' 'bout five hunderd, Jedge. I'll give ye notes, er ye kin take out another morgidge on the farm, whichever ye like. When we git out'n the courts mebbe we kin begin savin' t' pay ye back. If Dan'l Tewksb'ry'd jest left things alone when they was all settled —"

"Oh, well, it's settled again now; ye *both* ought t' be satisfied." Ben interrupted the Judge's cheerful attempt at solace. "'*Tain't settled!* Ye don't s'pose we're willin' t' take half when courts giv us the hull of it *twict*, do ye?"

Lawyer Carpenter says we kin 'peal agin t' the S'preme Court, 'n' we're goin' to do it right off," Mrs. Ben explained. "They giv us the verdick before 'n' Lawyer Carpenter says the's a good chanst fer us t' git it again."

"I guess, on thinkin' it over, I'd ruther make out a mortgage stid o' takin' your notes for the money, Ben," was the Judge's sole reply. He made no comment upon receiving this news of the intended appeal.

Driving away from the office, Ben asked, "Did the Justice say anything 'bout our 'pealin'? I didn't seem to ketch if he did."

"He never said a word," Mrs. Ben answered. "Prob'ly he was too much took by s'prise — he must a-thought we wuz goin' t' give up t' Dan'l."

By the end of another week the appeal to the Supreme Court had been made. Mr. Carpenter still represented Ben. Daniel had engaged a lawyer from Belvers. He had been forced to go to the Judge again for a hundred dollars, for which he had given his note, in order to defray preliminary expenses.

Just when the decision would be reached, it was, of course, impossible to tell.

At the Ben Tewksbury's a certain chill toward Mrs. Cutler and Priscilla was noticeable in the domestic atmosphere. They felt the change. They began again to suffer the small slights and humiliations dealt out to the dependent. The result of the appeal to the Supreme Court was not yet known, and while their taking in of the Cutlers had not been as potent a factor in the last trial as she had expected, Mrs. Ben thought it good policy to still appear in the light of their generous protector; but the relations between them were strained and liable to snap at a critical moment.

It was now about twelve or thirteen days before Thanksgiving. Emily Peabody had been invited to visit a girl friend living in a large New Hampshire city. "We'll have no end of parties and good times. Now, I won't take *no* for an answer!" Emily's friend had written, and Emily asked that she might go.

"I don't just like having her away at Thanksgiving time, Anson, and you feeling so poorly, too," Mrs. Peabody had said, discussing the invitation with her husband.

"Perhaps it would do her good to go away for awhile,"

Mr. Peabody suggested. "Don't you think she's getting pale and peaked-looking?"

"She *hasn't* looked very well lately," Mrs. Peabody admitted. "She seems out of spirits, for some reason."

"She needs a change; it'll brighten her up."

"I've been *hoping*," Mrs. Peabody answered with a slight sigh, "that she would be going away before long on a bridal trip — but she keeps putting Sid off."

"It'll be the best thing in the world for her to go away. When she comes back she'll take a different view of things, perhaps."

So Emily was being hastily prepared for her visit, to which she was looking forward with eagerness. "In all that time," she said to herself — and the thought gave her intense relief — "I shan't hear Sid Tewksbury's name once."

CHAPTER XXXIV

ARRANGING A MEETING

NED had had so very few opportunities of seeing Emily's handwriting that when a letter was handed to him he did not know, until he had opened it, that it was from her.

"Dear Ned"—the letter ran—"I am visiting a friend here, but I must go home the morning after Thanksgiving. I have to change cars at Merrence at nine o'clock. Can you meet me there? I think it is not very far from where you are working. There is something I must talk to you about."
"EMILY."

The brevity of the letter and the appeal to him to meet her at Merrence were more eloquent to him of her distress than many words would have been. That Emily should have written to him at all—disregarding the tacit understanding between himself, the Judge and her, was evidence that her stress of mind was very great: that she should propose a clandestine meeting was proof to Ned's mind that a serious situation must confront her. Up to the receipt of this letter, Ned had rested secure in her affection, and her assurance that she would wait for him, no matter how long it might be, before he should be able to claim her.

It had never before occurred to him that some combination of circumstances might arise which would be strong enough to force Emily into a marriage against her inclinations. It came to him now, suddenly, that perhaps such a contingency faced her. If it were really so, what would Emily want to do? What would she want *him* to do? What *could* he do? or—Emily was away from home—visiting—did she want to tell him that she had changed her mind about *him*?—had she met some one else?

. . . A thrill of fear shook him. It seemed to him he could not wait for the hours to pass until their meeting.

The letter reached him the day before Thanksgiving. He had previously planned with two or three of the young men employed with the engineering force to spend the holiday in a nearby town of considerable size, easily reached by trolley, there to indulge in what they designated as "a good Thanksgiving feed," at some hotel, and a *matinée* at the theatre, afterwards.

This trip would now have to be called off. Ned didn't know just how he would square it with his chums. Also he would be obliged to ask his friend, Mr. Harkiss, for a short leave of absence. The distance to Merrence was not more than forty miles, but there was no direct transit. Two changes of cars had to be made and train connections were not close. In order to meet Emily at nine o'clock in the morning he must spend Thanksgiving night there. He could remain with her during such time as she had to wait at the station and get back to his work sometime through the day — it could not be before afternoon.

Just before quitting work for the day Ned spoke to the engineer.

"I'd like to have part of the day off day after to-morrow, Mr. Harkiss," he said. "Will it be all right?"

The engineer smiled. "You and the boys going to have such a good time to-morrow that you'll have to lay up for repairs next morning?"

"Not exactly," Ned answered; "the fact is, I'm not going with the boys; I'm going to Merrence to-morrow."

"Oh! What's the matter?"

"I've had a letter; I'm to meet a friend of mine in Merrence. I'll go over to-morrow and get back Friday afternoon."

"Why, of course, you can go if it's necessary. We'll get along without you."

With "the boys," Ned did not get his way so easily. He was met with remonstrance, persuasion, and finally with considerable good-natured chaffing. "It's a *girl*, of course,"

said one, at which Ned suddenly and unconsciously grew so serious that the boys laughed again.

"Of *course*," echoed another of the young men, "and by his face it's a serious case."

"Now, see here, boys," Ned answered. "I'm awfully sorry to go back on you for the outing, but it's just happened that I *must*! so there's no use talking about it."

"You bet there's no use," laughed the first young man; "we can see you've got it bad;" and another of the youths chimed in, "All right, Ned, take our blessing with you."

All of this Ned took as good-naturedly as it was given, striving to conceal the anxiety that was besetting him.

CHAPTER XXXV

FATE RUNS SWIFTLY

ON Thanksgiving afternoon Sid, Will, Jen and Tina were waiting upon the station platform, at Millwell, for the coming train, which was to carry them to Merrence. Sid and Will had, with some difficulty, got away upon the greatest of New England home holidays. But Tina had boldly declared that they would be much more benefited by health and cheered in spirit by the relaxation of a holiday at Millwell than by staying at home just to eat turkey and pumpkin pie. As usual, they had had their way, and the early train had borne them to Millwell. They had taken Tina and Jen to a restaurant, where the dinner, if not so excellent as the young men would have had in their own homes, was spiced for them by more diverting conversation.

It was during the progress of the dinner that the suggestion that Merrence had been suggested by Tina. Neither Sid nor Will were eager to go — they were not anxious to go too publicly with the girls, but Tina and Jen coaxed. They wanted to go to some place for a change. What good was a holiday if they couldn't go somewhere? And by the time the dinner was eaten (with it they had had some conversation) Sid and Will had acquiesced. If anyone they knew saw them with the girls, why, they could say it was a casual or accidental meeting.

So they were waiting upon the platform in excellent spirits, laughing and chattering. The train came presently, and they went whirling on their way of pleasure. The sunshine was bright; the snow lay white and glistened on the fields. It was a pleasant ride for four young people full of life and spirits. Arrived in Merrence, they had to go to the roller skating rink. They had joined in it

time and the afternoon flew by. When they came out it was dark. The lights of the streets were burning, but the stores were closed and dark. The moon was showing, though yet palely.

"Goodness!" exclaimed Jen, "I didn't think it was so late."

"I'm hungry," said Will.

"Oh!" said Tina. "I wish it would go on being holiday like this, forever!"

"You're always wanting too much," Sid answered; but he pressed Tina's hand, resting within his arm, close to his side, and Tina laughed gaily.

"Let's go to supper now," said Will. "We'll have to think up something to kill time till that midnight train. I don't want any more skating rink in mine."

They did not linger long over the supper table.

"Let's walk down the street," said Sid, when they came out of the dining-room, "and see if there's anything going on."

The snow was crisp under their feet. The moon was growing fuller — its light brighter. They went on down the street in search of amusement, Tina and Jen hanging happily upon the arms of their respective escorts.

Suddenly Jen stopped. They were in front of a livery stable. It was open; a big lantern, glass enclosed, backed by a reflector, hung blazing in front of the door. Inside, dimmer lights shone here and there. "Say," Jen broke out, "what's the matter with a sleigh ride?"

Tina gave a little exclamation of delight. "Oh! splendid! why didn't we think of it before?"

A bulky form inside the door moved back out of sight. Sid was entering the stable. The bulky form, slipping into shadow, crept up the stairs to the loft. There it stopped for an instant, listening, shaking clenched hands; then it crept cautiously along to the outer door of the loft. The big door where the hay was taken in to the loft was tight shut. The bulky form stretched out strong arms and with tense fingers undid the fastenings; pushed the door open —

just the merest crack — looking down on Tina standing with Will and Jen full in the light of the lantern. The sound of Sid's voice came up through the opened door; in the dark the big form shook and the lips over and over muttered stiffly, "Tina! — Tina! — she's here with *him!* with *him!* — damn him to hell!" The big form crouched there, shaking, devouring Tina with burning eyes.

Sid was saying to a man who had come forward, "I'd like to hire a team and a double sleigh for an hour or so. Have you got what I want?"

The man looked at him without replying, turned his head aside, spat upon the floor, then lounged over to a box-like room partitioned off from one corner of the stable. Opening the door he stuck his head within, saying, "Boss! the's a feller out here wants a team." Leaving the door ajar, he lounged to the back part of the stable. Presently the proprietor came out.

"What's that? — a team?" He covered Sid and the three standing outside with a quick glance.

"Yes, for an hour or two — a team and a double sleigh."

The man hesitated. "Live here?" he asked.

"What's that got to do with it?" Sid demanded haughtily.

"Well, nothin'," the man responded slowly, "only I don't make a practice of lettin' teams go out with strangers — 'specially late at night."

"Oh, that's it!" Sid's tone became lofty, his manner swaggering. "I think I'm as responsible as anybody that comes here — I'll leave a deposit."

"That'll be all right," said the man.

Sid plunged his hand into his pocket. "How much?"

"Three hundred dollars."

Sid drew forth a good-sized roll of bills. He stripped five or six from the outside of the roll and handed them to the man.

Much to the gratification of Sid's pride the proprietor was surprised. He took the money, however, simply saying: "I'll give you a receipt. What name?"

"Ned Cutler."

The proprietor called out to the man at the back of the stable, "Bill, hitch up the grays." He went into his little office, returning in a moment with the receipt. Sid slipped it in his pocket with a lofty air of indifference and stepped outside to wait with Will and the girls while the team was being hitched to the sleigh.

"He hit you for a bunch, didn't he?" exclaimed Will.

"Oh, *so-so*!" drawled Sid. "Of course he thought I didn't have it, but he might have raised the ante — I could have called his bluff."

Tina slipped her hand again within his arm, hanging upon it as she tapped first one little foot and then the other upon the ground to keep them warm. She was so proud to-night of having such a sweetheart — so good-looking — so well dressed, with such haughty manners — and money! — why! — he could hand out hundreds of dollars as if they were so many pennies! — when they were married — she was looking up at him, smiling, sparkling, dimpling, while the blazing eyes devoured her through the aperture in the barn door aloft.

The team was soon ready — a pair of big and handsome grays. The girls were tucked snugly in with warm robes, the young men jumped in beside them, Sid and Tina on the front seat. They were off gaily, to the jingle of bells and the crisp cracking of snow under the horses' feet.

The proprietor watched them out of sight. "Young bloods," he muttered. As he put the three hundred dollars in his safe he concluded: "Guess they'll be careful of the team all right."

Above, the great door was drawn shut, the fastening slipped in place. The big form huddled on the floor a moment longer, sighing with fierce repressed breaths, "Tina! . . . Tina! . . . Tina!" Then the form arose and with slow step and half-bent body, stumbled down the steep, narrow stairway. There was a box near the foot of the stairs. He sank down upon it, staring stupidly. Bill was passing.

"Ye missed the circus, Gene. A couple o' fellers 'n' their girls — one of 'em was a peach 'n' no mistake; her feller put up three hundred dollars without a squeal. The boss near had a fit when the feller coughed up three hundred dollars like it was a handful o' hay — pretty near a year's wages fer you er me. What's the matter with ye, Gene? Ye act dopy. Here comes the single cutter and the brown mare — only three more rigs out now except young high-flyer's. Lord knows when *that*'ll git in. If ye had any bowels in ye ye'd offer to stay 'n' let me go home to the wife 'n' kids — seein' it's Thanksgivin'!"

"Go on," Gene answered laconically, rising to take care of the brown mare just entering the stable.

"Ye'll stay till they're all in?"

"Yes, go on home."

The three rigs of which Bill had spoken came in one by one and were taken care of. Then Gene sat and waited.

Moon and stars poured their light upon the vast sheets of white covering the earth. The snow caught their beams, sparkling and throwing them back until the world seemed floating in some realm of uncanny splendor. Over the hard-packed roads, past fields upon fields glittering with ghostlike diamonds, sped the sleigh with its gay quartette. Once beyond the boundaries of the town they gave full vent to their spirits.

They laughed, they sang, they shouted foolish nothings which to them seemed sallies of wit. The horses caught the exhilaration in the air — they tossed their heads as they sped along. The miles flew backward. They passed isolated farm homes, little towns fast asleep that waked to hear them as they went singing and laughing past. Then at a corner where two roads crossed there was a rambling house. A big gilt sign was over the door; gilt letters and gaily colored pictures in the windows. Above them lights flared. From somewhere inside came sounds of music and dancing.

"Oh!" exclaimed Tina, "that's just like home!"

"We'll go in and get something to warm us up," said Sid; "*I'm* getting chilly."

They found a shed at the rear for the horses. A man came out of the kitchen of the house who took charge of them, throwing the sleigh robes across their backs. Inside the house a holiday crowd was dancing and drinking beer. Will looked at his watch.

"What time is it?" Tina asked.

"Just ten," Will answered.

"That's all right," said Sid; "we haven't been much over an hour. We can stay here awhile and get back easy by half past eleven."

"But you told the man at the stable we'd only be gone two hours!" exclaimed Jen.

"He's got his three hundred dollars — he won't worry," replied Sid. Tina's pride rose at the casual way in which Sid spoke of three hundred dollars.

"He won't mind an extra hour at ten per," Will chimed in.

It was eleven o'clock when they drove from the road-house. They had stayed longer than they at first intended.

"We'll have to hustle or we'll never make it," said Will.

"I'll give the horses their heads, they'll go faster going home." Sid touched them with the whip and they sprang forward at a furious pace. They did indeed know that they were on the homeward way and their speed increased. They were running at a wild pace but under control. The occupants of the sleigh were boisterously merry. There had been plenty to drink at the road-house. They had drunk enough to make them somewhat hilarious; the air was invigorating; the swift, tearing pace of the horses intoxicating; their shouts of merriment, their outbursts of song rang far on the clear air. They were having what they called a "great time." On they flew, up hill and down, past wood and field; on the left now spread an open, clear expanse; to the right rose a wooded bank stretching off a little distance to where higher land loomed.

The horses, just even with the timber line, stopped suddenly. Tina, Sid, Will and Jen were thrown forward with a shock. "Go on there!" Sid shouted, bringing down the whip.

The animals made one leap forward, the length of their bodies, then stopped, rearing and plunging; a great glare of light engulfed the roysterers; an awful roar and clanging and shrieking of whistles was bearing down upon them; the sleigh stood fairly across the railroad track, the terrified horses rearing almost backward upon them. The girls screamed in agonized affright. Sid rose in his seat and brought the whip down. The sleigh gave a mighty leap forward. The hot breath of the screeching engine swept the backs of its terror-stricken occupants; the suction of the train whirled out to them.

The engineer leaned far out of his cab — he saw the pair of grays tearing along the road.

Sid had sunk back in his seat. The girls were crying hysterically. Will was shivering. After a moment Sid was on his feet again. "It was all the fault of the damn horses," he said thickly, and again and again and again the whip came down unmercifully.

"Oh, don't!" cried Jen, protesting.

"Let him do what he likes," Tina cried back. "If he hadn't whipped them before, where would we be now?"

"But they are going so fast; don't you see how they're going?" There was renewed fright in Jen's voice.

Sid stopped whipping — the horses were running madly. No one spoke for a moment or two. Then Will called: "Pull them up, Ned; they'll be too hot now, when we take 'em in."

Sid did not answer. The horses tore on more wildly, more furiously. Will leaned forward.

"Hold them in, I tell you."

Sid answered through shut teeth; his grip was tense on the reins: "Hold 'em in, nothing; *they're running.*"

The silence of terror fell upon them all. The voices that but a few moments before had rung out in loud jest

and song and laughter, were hushed now in a paralysis of fear; the faces that had been flushed and smiling, were now white and drawn.

Trees, fields, fences, houses, whirled past—the earth seemed rising to meet them. Ahead was a small wooden bridge, spanning a gully.

“Keep them to the middle!” shouted Will; “for God’s sake, keep them to the middle.”

There was a quick, terrific crash; a wrenching and tearing of wood, a wild stamping and plunging of horses, a jangling of bells, a cracking and snapping of harness; then the sound of horses running again, though not so furiously; through the intense stillness, from far off, the sound of bells was borne tinkling through the air; the sounds died at last, leaving only unbroken silence. After a moment, Jen’s voice arose, plaintively: “Will, where are you? Where is anybody?”

“You all right, Jen? Scot! I went into that snow bank deep enough to smother me.” Will was struggling out of the snow that half filled the gully. “I guess it’s a good thing for me it *was* deep. Hello, S-Ned; where’d you come from?”

“That snow pile over there—what a fling I got; my shoulder’s numb—came within an ace of cracking my head.”

“Where’s Tina?” Jen cried out suddenly. “Tina! Tina!” she called. There was no answer. They began to look about for her in alarm, calling her name vainly; there was no response. They ran to the end of the bridge, and, leaning over the low, stout rail against which the sleigh had struck, peered down into the gully. A dark heap, partly buried in snow, lay there.

“There she is!” Jen cried out hysterically. “She’s hurt!”

Sid and Will got down to the motionless heap as fast as they could. The snow was deep in the gully; they sank deeper and deeper; they could, with difficulty, plough their way through; it was waist high where Tina was lying.

"Tina! . . . Tina! . . . are you hurt? . . . Tina!" . . . There was neither word nor movement in response.

The two young men lifted her out of the snow; they turned her face up to the light; it was the face of the dead.

"What's the matter?" asked Will, his teeth chattering. "Is she in a faint?"

"I think — she's — dead." Sid's face was scarcely less white than the one he was gazing upon.

"Dead! . . . No! . . . she can't be! . . . Why, the rest of us ain't hurt! . . . Bring her up on the road! . . . We'll rub her! . . . We'll do something to bring her to!"

Between them they drew Tina's body up over the snow. They laid her on Will's and Sid's overcoats with which they improvised a couch at the roadside. They chafed her hands; they called to her.

"Haven't you got some whiskey?" cried Will impatiently; "when we ought to have some, we haven't got a drop."

Sid was bending over Tina, examining the body. He had not studied medicine without learning a few things.

"It wouldn't be any use if we had it," he answered Will, thickly; "her neck is broken."

Jen was crying, wringing her hands. A panic of fear suddenly seized the young men. They whispered together in voices that trembled.

"What are we going to do? Everything'll come out now."

Far away from the direction of the town came the shriek of a locomotive.

"That's our train; it must have been the one that passed us; we can't get back to Millwell to-night." Sid's eyes were staring — his brain was working.

"I know that. For heaven's sake, wake up! . . . This is awful. . . . What are we going to do? . . . I can't think. . . ."

"The horses'll go back to the stable . . . the man's got my three hundred . . . that'll satisfy him . . . he won't bother about us . . ."

"That's so — that's all right; but what about *her*?" Will looked fearsomely at Tina's body stretched out close to them, with Jen crying bitterly over it.

"She's dead," . . . Sid went on. He was shaking from head to foot. "She'd have to be buried anyhow. . . . We'll bury her in the snow . . . down there . . . winter's just setting in . . . she'll keep on being covered deeper and deeper . . . by spring . . ." His voice trailed off in a sepulchral whisper, "it'll be too late to trace us. . . . It'll be all right if Jen don't say anything. . . ."

Will called Jen over to them. He explained what they meant to do. "It's the only thing that'll keep us all out of an awful scrape," he said.

"But they'll ask me about Tina at home," she sobbed; "what'll I tell *them*?"

"Why, I don't know — say Tina got mad at us when we were out walking — and left us — and we don't know where she went —"

"Oh, I don't like to — I don't want to leave her here —"

"See here Jen! you've *got* to! If you don't, you'll never see *me* again —"

The poor girl, smote with desolation at the thought of losing her lover, acquiesced. Yes, she would — she would do what he asked —

Then, with all the haste they could make they drew the body of Tina down over the snow, to the bottom of the gully. With feet and hands they kicked and scooped away the snow, making a deep hollow into which they put the body, covering it well with snow. They were shaking in every limb; the cold sweat poured from them; Jen, standing by the roadside, her hands pressed tight over her eyes, wept dismally. At last it was done. Sid and Will were standing beside her.

"Come on," they urged.

"Where — where are we going?"

"We've got to walk to the town . . . get there in time for the train to Boston . . . there's one leaves about four o'clock."

"Are we going to Boston?"

Will had taken Jen by the arm as he was speaking, and was hurrying her along the road toward the town. Sid was ahead of them, forcing himself on with staggering steps.

"Sid and I are going," said Will. In his terror he forgot and spoke Sid's name; Jen did not notice it.

"When we get to the station, we mustn't any of us be seen together . . . you can stay in the station . . . as if you were waiting for some train . . . don't let anybody see you crying . . . mind that — or you get us all in trouble. . . . Just as quick as it's daylight, you slip out . . . make for the trolley and go to North Madden . . . wait there until a train comes along for Millwell . . ."

"Oh, Will! . . . when'll I see you again?"

"I don't know . . . never . . . if this thing gets out through you . . ."

"Oh, Will! . . ."

"Dry up, now! . . . If anybody sees you crying, they'll be suspicious of something. . . . Mind, now — if anybody asks for Tina . . . *anybody* . . . just say you had a spat in Millwell . . . and she left you . . . you didn't see her again . . . and Ned and I went to Boston . . . and you . . . where the devil could you go? . . . Oh, I don't know . . . but think up something . . . and stick to it . . . stick to what you say. . . ."

So Will talked with breathless pauses, admonishing Jen as they hurried, trembling, slipping, terrified, along their way. It was well toward four o'clock when they reached the town, almost in a state of exhaustion, but as they came near to the lights of the station they paused, gathering themselves together, trying to draw their faces into natural, ordinary expression.

A number of people were arriving at the station to take the early train. Sid and Will, separately, bought their tickets and mingled unobtrusively with other men waiting about. Jen sat unnoticed upon one of the seats in the women's room.

One hour, two hours, three hours, had passed. Gene still sat waiting with staring eyes. The proprietor came again out of his little office — he had been coming out very often.

“That rig in yet, Gene?”

“Not yet, boss.”

“I wish I'd charged 'em *twenty* dollars an hour. I want to go home and go to bed.” The jingle of bells and noise of tramping feet fell upon his ears.

“I guess they're here now.” The stare in Gene's eyes turned to a dull glow.

The proprietor stepped to the door. The pair of grays was turning slowly in, the wrecked sleigh dangling after them. “What's this! Here, Gene! Come here!” He took the horses by the bit; they were still nervous and trembling; they were crusted with sweat and foam.

Gene had hurried forward. He cried out hoarsely: “They've run away! Where is she — my Tina?”

The proprietor turned in amazement at Gene's frenzied voice. His eyes were wild, his features working. “Have ye gone crazy? Who's *Tina*?”

“Tina . . . she was my sweetheart. . . . Ah Jesus! . . . how I loved her. . . . He took her from me . . . that Ned Cutler. . . . It was his fine clothes . . . and the money . . . damn him! . . . Where is she now? . . . She is hurt, perhaps. . . . I must go. . . . I must see. . . . I must find her. . . .”

He ran wildly from the stable — on — up the street — following the direction the gay party had taken when they drove away.

CHAPTER XXXVI

UNEXPECTED HAPPENINGS

NED and Emily, talking earnestly together, were seated upon the very bench in the waiting room, where at an early hour that same morning Jen had sat, trembling, miserable, striving to repress her grief and fright, looking anxiously for the first break of day that she might walk alone through the streets and board a trolley car without attracting curious attention.

"I don't know what you think of me for writing to you, and asking you to come here to meet me," Emily was saying. "I didn't know whether you would take the trouble to come—"

"Take the trouble! Why, Emily, you know I'd come on my head, if I couldn't get here any other way."

"I don't know what *people* would say," Emily went on anxiously; "and if mother and father knew it—"

"They won't find out anything about it from *me*," said Ned.

"You see," Emily went on, "it isn't just because it's *you*; but they would think it was very improper for me to write to *any* young man and ask him to meet me like this."

"Well, Emmy, they don't need to know it, and it wasn't improper for you to write to me—because we're engaged, aren't we?" Ned was hesitating, almost fearful of her answer.

Emily interrupted him. "Oh, Ned! that's why I wanted so to see you. I just felt as if *I must* talk to you; I don't know how I'm ever going to hold out; they're so bound and determined I shall marry Sid."

A comforting warmth rushed through Ned's heart. "But they can't *make* you marry him, Emmy."

"Oh, you don't know; you don't know how mother talks to me," Emily answered him, in keen distress. Then she went on to repeat her mother's arguments, the most potent one being the appeal to marry Sid to relieve her father's mind of worry in his failing state of health.

"When she talks to me that way," said Emily, "it seems as if it's just cruel and wicked of me not to help father, if I can — even by marrying Sid."

Ned looked troubled. "I don't know what to say, Emmy." He paused for an instant before he could ask: "Do you think you could be happy if you married Sid?"

"No, Ned, no. I couldn't. I can't like Sid. I can't; and now, mother has written me to hurry back home because father is not so well. I know they'll be urging me harder than ever; I'm afraid I can't hold out against them even if I want to; that's why I felt as if I *must* see you. I thought perhaps you could tell me something that would help me to hold out."

Never had Ned felt so wretchedly helpless.

"I don't know, Emmy," he said, "whether I *ought* to say anything to help you hold out. I didn't know it was going to be so hard for you; I thought you could just go on staying at home, being happy and having a good time until I was well enough off to ask you to marry me; but it'll be a good while yet before I'm earning money enough to take care of you —"

"I suppose so," Emily assented disconsolately.

"And then there's mother and Priscilla, you know. But I'll do whatever you say," Ned went on, with rising determination; "if you want to get married *now*, *we will*, and trust luck for what comes next."

Emily turned to him hopefully. "I *couldn't* marry Sid *then*, could I? No matter what they said, I *couldn't*; and so I'd just say no, I can't, I can't, I *can't*; and after awhile they'd see it was no use and they'd stop asking me."

"Let's go," said Ned; "we've got about an hour; we'll find a minister —"

"Oh, Ned! are you sure you don't mind?" cried Emily.

"I never thought of such a thing as this; but it will help me to hold out against Sid; and it won't hinder you, Ned; you can go on just the same; and by and by, when you are making enough money, we'll tell them; and you can get a dear little house somewhere; and we four will live in it—you and your mother and Priscilla and me—"

This had been Ned's dream—and it seemed as if it were coming true, hearing Emily repeat it.

They found a minister without great difficulty, who married them with despatch and without any apparent curiosity or surprise at their coming. Evidently marrying was a much more ordinary and commonplace affair with him than Ned and Emily had deemed possible. They had been almost fearful of approaching him lest he should suspect the clandestine nature of their errand, question them, and refuse to perform the ceremony; but the minister, an elderly man, saw only a good-looking young couple of legal age without doubt, somewhat embarrassed, as was usually the case, and summoning two members of his household as witnesses, he performed a brief and simple ceremony, making Ned and Emily man and wife.

They hurried back to the station, fearful lest Emily should miss her train. There were three or four minutes still to wait. Their marriage had been so suddenly thought of they could not, even now, realize the full seriousness of the step they had taken.

"It doesn't seem as if we had really been married, does it, Ned? It's like a dream."

"You're not getting sorry, are you?"

"No, I'm not. Are you?"

"Not a bit sorry, Emily; don't let *that* worry you."

"But I believe I'm beginning to feel a little bit frightened. Are you?"

"Not a bit frightened," Ned answered, with a ghost of a smile; "but I'm beginning to feel my responsibility."

"*Don't*, Ned, because I'm not going to be one bit of trouble to you. You are to go right on with your work; and oh, Ned! you don't know how proud I am of the way

you've got along; and I'll keep right on living at home and doing everything I can to please father and mother — except to marry Sid Tewksbury. And *now*," Emily grew so light-hearted at the thought of this relief, that for the first time since they met that morning she laughed the pretty, happy laugh that Ned remembered from the days when he used to carry her slate and bag of books on the way home from school; "*now* I know they can't talk me into *that*, no matter *what* they say."

The train was coming in, with its warning shrieks, its puffing, roaring and clanging. Ned helped Emily aboard; there was a quick clasping of hands. "Good-bye, Ned."

"Good-bye, Emily."

There was a few minutes' delay after Ned had reached the platform. Through the window Emily smiled out at him; then with two or three preliminary creaks and groans the train began to move on. With one last smile in answer to a wave of his hand in good-bye, Emily was gone.

The short delay of the train had been caused by the detaching of the rear car from which several gentlemen descended, apparently to walk about and stretch their legs, as if they had been riding for some time and needed exercise.

The baggage master, coming out upon the platform, seemed inclined to be sociable. "That's a *private* car," he said, nodding in the direction of the car just detached; "b'longs t' the pres'dent o' the road."

"Is that so?" Ned asked, feigning an interest he felt due to the friendliness of the baggage master.

"Yes, the pres'dent and some of the other officials are taking a trip over the road. They're waiting for another engine to pick 'em up 'n' take 'em over the new branch down to Willardville."

Someone here called to the talkative baggage master, who hustled inside to attend to some duty, leaving Ned leaning against a window sill of the station, absorbed in thoughts of what had just transpired between himself and Emily — thoughts that stretched out into possible conse-

quences of to-day's rash act — for that it had been rash Ned did not attempt to deny in his own mind.

The men who had alighted from the private car were walking about. Ned had been quite oblivious of them and of their movements, wrapped in his own thoughts. He was surprised after a short time had passed, when one of the party stopped in front of him, addressing him, looking at him with intent interest and curiosity.

"I think," the man was saying, "that I have seen you before. Do you remember ever having seen me?"

Ned looked at him for an instant, blankly. Then recognition dawned in his eyes, a smile crept about his lips. "Yes," he said; "I got one good look at you after the policeman took the horse's head."

The man held out his hand for Ned's, which he clasped heartily.

"I want to thank you. I might not be here to-day but for your heroism —"

Ned interrupted: "It wasn't anything — it wasn't much trouble to stop him."

"Well, anyway," the man answered, "you got away without giving me a chance to show my appreciation of what you'd done."

"I didn't want anything, sir."

"Evidently not; but I've always wondered why you went sprinting up the street in such hot haste — not letting me even thank you."

Ned smiled broadly at the recollection of what was, at the time, such a serious matter to him. "You would have sprinted too, I guess, if someone had hooked your satchel and was running off with it."

"Your satchel?"

"Yes. You see, I'd only been in Boston a few hours. My satchel contained all my worldly possessions. When I dropped it to go for the horse — well, somebody must have thought they needed it more than I did."

"You didn't get it back?"

"No; whoever took it could beat me running."

"But, you say it contained all your possessions; how did you get along without it?"

"Oh, I got along all right," Ned answered cheerfully.

The man studied Ned attentively. "You might have hunted me up if you had tried; I should have been only too glad to have helped you —"

"It served me right for being such a greenhorn, and I managed to pull through."

"Your people have money, perhaps?"

"To tell the truth, they haven't; but a fellow can get along without much money if he has to, don't you think so?"

The man made no direct answer. He seemed to be thinking about something. An engine was backing and fussing, preparing to take up the private car.

"Do you live here?" he asked. To which Ned replied that he was only there for a few hours on business.

"If you don't mind," the man persisted, "I'd like to know your name and something about yourself."

To this Ned gave the briefest possible sketch of himself. His name was Ned Cutler. He came from Columbia Corners. His mother and his sister lived there — his father was dead. He was fitting himself for civil engineering, as fast as he could. He had studied some and he was now working with the engineering corps that was putting the bridge over . . . River on the new branch between N . . . and G . . .

"I'm much obliged to you," said the man; "I'm glad to know something of the history of my preserver; you see — I insist on considering you that." He held out his hand to Ned. "Our car is ready to start, so I'll have to say good-bye. I hope I shall meet you again."

"Thank you, sir," Ned replied, returning the hearty hand-shake of the older man.

As the engine drew the private car away from the station, the baggage master eyed Ned curiously.

"I didn't know," he said finally, "that you was a friend of the pres'dent's,"

"I'm not," answered Ned in surprise.

"You ain't a stranger, nor yet an enemy — if talking and hand-shaking go for anything."

"Was *that* the president of the road?"

"Don't mean to say you didn't know it? Why, I thought you must be the best o' friends."

"So we are," Ned responded, to the increased perplexity of the baggage master.

Presently Ned was on his own way, reaching the bridge, where he found Mr. Harkiss and the boys at work, about the middle of the afternoon. The morning had been eventful beyond his wildest imaginings and it was small wonder if he went back to work silent and preoccupied. Mr. Harkiss, observing his more than usual seriousness, had asked him if he had any bad news, which Ned assured him he had not.

He then related to him the incident of the runaway horse and his meeting with the man he had rescued, who had turned out to be the president of the — R. R.—at least, he had been so informed by the baggage master.

"If he *is* the president of the road he could do a lot for you, Ned — if he felt like it."

"I think," Ned answered reflectively, "that he would have given me some money; but I gave him plainly to understand that I didn't want any pay for doing what I did. From the way he spoke when he left me, he has accepted the service as I gave it—free of charge. He's a fine man though, and I'm proud to know him."

Ned's chums had come back full of reminiscences of their holiday, which they took pleasure in detailing for the entertainment of anyone who would listen to them. They, too, had noticed Ned's extreme taciturnity, and had rallied him about it.

"Come, Ned," said one; "what's the matter with you? You haven't told us a thing about your trip."

"There isn't anything to tell," Ned had answered. "You fellows had all the adventures."

“Oh, there’s no use trying to pump him!” cried the second young man, with good-natured chaffing; “but from the length of his face since he got back, it’s dollars to doughnuts that his best girl gave him the sack last night.”

CHAPTER XXXVII

BLIND REASONING

WHEN she reached Union Junction, Emily found her mother waiting for her. She was surprised to see Will and Sid standing beside the hired sleigh in which her mother had come over to meet her. As Sid hurried forward to assist her, she was struck by his extreme pallor. What were they all doing at the Junction?—could they in any way have heard—

“Has anything happened, Sid?” she asked quickly, turning a startled glance full upon him.

Sid’s thoughts in their turn were ever recurring to that grim secret of his own, which he was guarding with inward fear and trembling. He started as Emily questioned him. “What could have happened? Why should you think that anything had?”

“Oh, nothing, only I didn’t expect to see you and Will here, and it seemed to me that you were awfully white—and, well—worried . . . or anxious-looking.” Emily had been studying his face intently as she spoke.

“That’s just it, I *have* been worried, and I *am* anxious,” Sid rejoined, forcing himself to smile and speak lightly. “Will and I went on to Boston yesterday instead of staying in Millwell, expecting to leave for home on the six o’clock train out of Boston. We left a call, of course, when we went to bed,—but it was forgotten, or we didn’t hear it, and we both overslept. I telegraphed your father, and to mother, how it was and that we’d leave on the next train. We just got in a few minutes ahead of you. Will and I were both upset about getting back so late, and I’m afraid your father will be annoyed. It’s the first time I haven’t been on hand when the bank opened.”

As Sid labored on with the elaborate explanations, which he and Will had manufactured, he wondered, fearfully, if they sounded like the truth; they came back to his ears with such hollow falsity.

"Who is at the bank? Mother wrote me that father is feeling very poorly."

"That's the worst of it," replied Sid, "he's in a rather bad way, and he had to go to the bank himself this morning because I wasn't there. So you see I've got good reason for being worried and nervous. I guess I'll have to get you to put in a good word for me, Emily." Sid turned upon Emily what was meant to be an ingratiating smile, but which was not much more than a mechanical contortion of the lips.

Emily answered him pleasantly enough, but in a way that pointedly disclaimed his assumption of a mutual interest. "I don't think there is any reason why I should speak to father. He seems to think that anything you do is all right."

Mrs. Peabody leaned out of the sleigh to kiss Emily. "I'm sorry, Sid," she said, "that there isn't room for you and Will to ride back with us."

"Oh, we left our wheels here, you know — we'll get to the Corners before you will; thank you though, just the same."

"I was glad we didn't have to ride with 'em," Will broke out, after they had passed the easy-going nag Mrs. Peabody was driving. "I keep thinking that everybody *can tell* we're lying about last night."

"So do I," Sid answered, "but they *don't* know, and if we all keep our heads, we've got a good chance of getting through without being found out."

"I hope to goodness we will, that's all!" replied Will, lugubriously.

Sid was more alarmed and anxious than he cared to confess to Will. The tragedy of the night before was getting more and more terribly upon his nerves. The death of Tina had been an accident. True, if they had been quite

themselves — if they had been properly careful — it would not have happened; yet it was an accident, for which no one could really be held responsible. It was the necessity for concealment that had given it the aspect of a crime. Discovery, for Sid at least, meant consequences almost as disastrous as if he had been intentionally instrumental in the sudden extinguishing of the life spark in foolish, gay, ill-fated Tina. It would be the death blow to his career at the bank as well as his aspiration to become the son-in-law of its president.

With the futility of reasoning, common to most people, who seek to cover the perpetration of an offense, Sid had arranged the details of concealment in his own mind so satisfactorily that he felt almost, if not quite, safe from discovery.

The livery stable proprietor, he argued, would be more than reimbursed for damage to the rig. If therefore he, — Ned Cutler — as the man knew him, did not turn up, the man would simply pocket the money and say nothing.

Tina, not being seen in Millwell, would be supposed to have gone home; her parents would believe her in Millwell. Finally her disappearance must become known. Jen would declare that Tina had left her in anger — what then? Why, girls often went away like that and were never heard from, and Tina's people were not the sort who would know how to investigate. That part of it was all right if they could depend on Jen. As for Tina's body — here it must be said in justice to Sid — a sick feeling of grief and remorse almost overcome him: but it would do her no good to have things found out, he argued inwardly, and he was fighting for his whole future. Tina's body would not be discovered for a long time, long enough, the thought gave him an inward shudder, to render it unrecognizable.

With these thoughts running in his mind, and very similar ones in Will's, it is not strange that they drove their wheels towards the Corners almost in silence.

Once at the bank they were obliged, with forced spirits which they strove to make appear natural, to go over again

their made-up recital of the way in which they happened to be belated in their return, with profuse expressions on Sid's part of regret that Mr. Peabody should have been subjected to so much trouble and annoyance on his account.

All this Mr. Peabody seemed to take in very good part, to Sid's great relief. He remained at the bank until he saw Mrs. Peabody and Emily drive up to their gate. Then he said: "So long as you're here, Sid, I'll go over to the house for awhile. I'm not feeling quite as well as usual this morning."

Emily ran to meet her father as he was crossing the street. He kissed her affectionately and when she saw the pleasure in his eyes at sight of her, and noticed the growing thinness and pallor of his face, her heart contracted within her. Perhaps, she thought, she ought to have done as her father and mother wished, no matter at what sacrifice of her own feelings.

"Get in, Anson, we'll drive up to the livery stable and tell them to send for the horse; Emily has had enough traveling this morning," Mrs. Peabody said. Mr. Peabody understood that his wife had something to say to him, so without more ado he stepped into the sleigh.

"How do you think Emily seems?" asked Mr. Peabody as soon as they were well away from the gate.

"Better — very much better in every way than when she went to N — and in good spirits, I think." She paused for an instant and then went on in a tone of conviction, "but there's one thing sure, Anson, the time has come when *you* must exercise *your authority*."

"Why? — what about?" Mr. Peabody turned a look of surprise upon his wife. She was not given to expressing herself with so much emphasis.

"About *Sid*, of course. I talked to her on our way from the Junction, but she's just as obstinate as ever about him, and for no reason except that she says she doesn't like him."

Mr. Peabody reflected. "That isn't a bad reason, after all."

"Now, Anson; desirable husbands are not hanging plenti-

fully on trees — waiting for girls to sort them over and make a choice. Where will Emmy find anyone who is just the thing in every way for her — as Sid is?”

“I’ve told her,” Mrs. Peabody went on, “all about the doctor saying that you ought to take a sea voyage for your health. I’ve told her how much easier you would be in your mind about her, and about the bank too, if Sid was your son-in-law. Somehow all I said didn’t seem to make much impression on her, but it’s always different when a *man* speaks!”

Mr. Peabody seemed to ponder his wife’s words. Finally he said, thoughtfully, “Well, we’ll see, I’ll have a talk with Emily in a day or two.”

When Gene ran madly away from the stable, leaving his employer to care for the horses, there was but one thought, one name, one image surging through his whole being — *Tina!* To find her and help her if she was hurt; to find her — to see her — to hear her speak, though it might be only to flout him, if she was uninjured.

The night was still bright with moonlight and starlight, but he ran blindly, seeing darkly as through a blood-red mist. He did not know which road they had taken, but he ran on — on — urged by a mad impulse of action. He must run — run here — there — everywhere — until he found her. It was past the middle of the day when, with his strong hands, he dug away the snow that covered Tina’s body, and with an awful cry looked down upon her pretty, cold, dead face.

He had traced them at last by a few people he questioned who lived along the main road. Yes, they had heard a sleigh pass in the night — they had been awakened by sounds of singing and laughing — some folks out for a moonlight ride; then he had asked at the road-house. Yes, they had been there; they had left, oh, perhaps eleven, perhaps half past. Why? What was wrong?

To which Gene answered: “Nothing — nothing much —

I want to speak with one of them. . . . Which way did they go from here?"

The hostler who had brought the team 'round the night before, pointed the way to the town, and Gene started on his return tramp. At the branching of the roads he paused. He had followed the main road out. He had come now to where Sid had taken the fatal short cut.

"They went that way," said Gene, and strode onward. He was on the trail now, his eyes roving to catch any sign that might tell him the fate of Tina.

He came at last to the bridge. . . . He saw at one side of the road where there had been much trampling of the snow . . . down the gully and up again he saw the marks of someone going up and down and up and down — of more than one person; . . . there was a wide mark as of something having been dragged; . . . with a hoarse exclamation he sprang down the gully . . . he began to dig and tear in the snow.

There were teams going back and forth on the road at intervals. The driver of one stopped in fright as Gene's cry rang upon his ears. He jumped from his sleigh and looking over the railing of the bridge saw the dead girl, and Gene standing over her, like a mad man.

"Hello. What's wrong down there?" he cried, prepared to jump into his sleigh and get off should Gene make a move to come up toward him.

"Murder — it is murder! They have killed her; my Tina!" shouted Gene in wild incoherence. "Go, quick; the police. Tell them to come; for the good God's sake, tell them to come quick."

The man jumped into his sleigh and urging his horses to their best speed, soon startled police headquarters with news of the presumed murder.

A little crowd had gathered on the bridge, watching Gene in his guard over the dead, when the officers of the law arrived upon the scene of the tragedy. From Gene they heard the story of the rich young swell, Ned Cutler, who had come

from Belver's to Thibeau's place and had dazzled his Tina and taken her away from him . . . of his hiring the team . . . of the return of the runaway horses . . . of his own search to find if Tina had been injured . . . how his curiosity had been aroused by the condition of the snow . . . how he had found her.

The ground was gone over carefully. The officers remained on guard until the arrival of the coroner. Exhaustive notes were made of the conditions surrounding the body . . . the footprints deep sunk in the snow . . . the sweep made by the probable dragging of the body . . . its concealment, evidently done with deliberate intent to hide the body.

That night two detectives were on their way to Belvers, armed with a warrant for the arrest of Ned Cutler for the death of Tina Thibeau, under suspicious circumstances.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

HIT AND MISS

MR. ELNATHAN TIBBITTS received a pleasant shock of surprise on the afternoon of the following day by the visit of two strangers. They entered the "Emporium" with a breezy air of business, and seeing Mr. Tibbitts pottering about, re-arranging his merchandise, one of the visitors at once addressed him.

"I am addressing Mr. Elnathan Tibbitts, I presume?"

The tone in which the question was put subtly conveyed the impression that *if he were* addressing Mr. Elnathan Tibbitts, then he was speaking to a person of great importance.

Mr. Tibbitts swelled to the occasion. "Yes, sir, you hev that pleasure."

"We came over from Belvers," the speaker went on. "They know you over there; told us Mr. Elnathan Tibbitts was postmaster and proprietor of the biggest general store in Columbia Corners." He neglected to add he had also been told that if he wanted to find out anything about anybody's business in the region of Columbia Corners, he could find it out from Tibbitts.

Mr. Tibbitts bristled with vanity.

"It's s'prisin' how publick men does git talked of threw-out the country!"

"By the way, there ought to be mail here from my firm in Boston for me. Has anything come, Postmaster? William I. Brown —"

"I don't jest seem to reck'lect that name," Mr. Tibbitts pondered with weighty reflectiveness; "I'll jest run over the letters agin to make sure." He bustled into the little post-office enclosure and from the general delivery box took four or five remaining letters, whose addresses he already

knew by heart. One by one he held each close under his nose, reading the superscription aloud, gazing over the upper edge of each envelope with his crossed eyes for his enquirer's "not mine,"—delivered each time, with dramatically growing disappointment. "Well, that's strange. I wrote my firm I was coming here to-day to look the town over with a view to having them send some of their drummers this way. It's mighty queer there's no letter from them."

"Oh, well," drawled his companion, speaking for the first time, "you'll probably hear from them to-morrow in Litchfield."

"I suppose so," assented the first speaker, "but I'm a little put out at not getting a letter here. Well, Mr. Tibbitts," he said, turning again to that gentleman, "you've got a smart-looking town here, and you needn't be surprised if you see some drummers dropping in. If anyone tells you he came through William I. Brown, treat him right, won't you?"

"I certainly will, Mr. Brown. You kin alwus rely on Elnathan Tibbitts fer doin' the han'some thing! Hev a see-gar! I got a splendid box here—got 'em in fer hol'day trade las' fou'th o' July—they're a little extry—five cents straight or three fer ten—the *Calvee*—keep 'em fer choice cust'mers. Don't feel skeert 'bout takin' one cause the' ain't many on 'em left!"

"I've got a friend that used to know some folks round here," drawled he who had been the least talkative of the twain, as he lit and puffed Mr. Tibbitts' choice contribution to the gayety of the occasion. "I think the name was Cutter—or Culler—or something like that."

"We ain't got no Cutterses ner yet no Cullerses hereabouts. Like enough you mean the Cut-lerses!"

"I guess that *is* the name—there's a son, I think—"

"Yes—Ned, ye mean?"

"That's the family all right—Ned Cutler—that's the name, sure. Live near here?"

"Well, ye see, *Ned* ain't here no more."

"Oh! is that so?" There was a certain blankness in tone that did not escape Mr. Tibbitts.

"Guess you'd like to see him, mebbe? No, *Ned* ain't been round here fer quite a spell."

"Family gone away too?"

"No; his ma 'n' sister Priscilla's livin' with Ben Tewksb'ry. Mis' Cutler wuz a Tewksb'ry, ye know. Sence Cutler died his fam'ly's hed to live with one er other o' her brothers. Them's the Tewksb'ry boys that's been in court fer a matter of goin' on two year—'xpect you've heerd about it?—a lawin' t' see which one of 'em'll git Lilack Lane."

"Oh, yes; we've heard about that." It was William I. Brown who spoke. He had been lounging against the counter, listening, puffing very sparing little whiffs of smoke into the air. But these Cutlers, you say they've been living with her brothers? Why, from what I've heard, I thought the Cutlers must have money to burn."

"Well, they ust to be pretty well fixed. Cutler hisself didn't ekzac'ly *burn* enny money, but everything he hed seemed to sort o' *melt* 'n' run away f'm 'im; 'mounts to the same thing in the end ez burnin', I guess."

"What's the son, *Ned*, doing? Where is he now?"

"Ez to what he's doin',"—here Mr. Tibbitts leaned over the counter toward his questioners and became confidentially mysterious—"we don't none of us know *ekzackly*. His folks don't hev much to say about him—guess he's suthin' of a black sheep, if the trewth was told."

The slightest possible glance of intelligence passed between the two men.

"And folks don't know where he is now, eh?"

"Well, a good many folks don't, o' course, but in my o-ficial capac'ity, I've knowed about where he's been most o' the time. He writes to his ma and his sister."

"That was a first rate cigar, Mr. Tibbitts; smoke with me this time." Talkative "Brown" proffered a cigar.

"Do you know, Tibbitts, the more I see of your town, the more I like it. I don't see what place Ned Cutler could find that he'd prefer to this."

"Oh, drop Ned Cutler. What do we care where he is?" drawled the silent one.

"Now I think these family histories are mighty interesting, especially when they're told by an entertaining man like Mr. Tibbitts here; he's got my curiosity all worked up about this Cutler family; it's as good as a story. Where did you say he is now?"

"I ain't said, *yit*; I could tell, but my o-ficial capac'ity fer-bids."

"Come on, Brown, we ought to be going; you're wasting valuable time on these old family histories. Good day, Mr. Tibbitts, I'll recommend my folks — we're in the gents' furnishing line — to send one of our men to look you up. Come on, Brown, and quit your fooling." With this he went out, as if expecting Brown to follow him.

But Brown lingered. "Honest, Tibbitts, I'd like to know where this young Cutler is — these people that used to know them'll be dead anxious to hear all about him. My friend out there 'd like to know too, only he's too polite to ask questions. There can't be any objection to your telling *us*?"

"Well, if you'll promise not to tell where you got your information —"

"Why, of course. I'll not mention your name in the matter."

"There's a letter kem to-day — mind, I ain't sayin' who frum ner who to — that's postmarked *Woodvale*."

"I know *Woodvale*; not a patch on Columbia Corners! — can't see what anyone would want to go there for — but everyone to his taste you know. Good-bye, Mr. Tibbitts, hate to tear myself away from such good company, but business before pleasure, you know. Good day — I'll see that you get in on the inside on any orders you give to the men from my firm." With great seeming friendliness and superabundant good humor "Brown" took leave of Tib-

bitts. As soon as he joined his companion he exclaimed under his breath, "I've got it." They climbed into their conveyance and started up the street.

"Where?" queried "Brown's" companion.

"*Woodvale*."

"We've got to go back to Merrence."

"Yes. Can we make *Woodvale* to-night?"

"That depends on train connections, but I don't think we can."

"It's my opinion the bird'll be gone."

"Can't tell. We'll know when we get there."

As the strangers were driving away, Sid Tewksbury went into Tibbitts' store.

The bank had just closed. Mr. Tibbitts wore an air of elation as he waited on him. "The Corners is lookin' up, Sid," said he. "I guess we folks 't's got prope'ty here ain't goin' to git none the wust of it."

"Why? what's doing now?"

"See them fellers drivin' away ez you come along?"

"I didn't get a good look at them. Did you say they were strangers?" Sid strove to conceal a sudden anxiety.

"Yes — drummers."

"Oh, *drummers!*" the relief was great.

"I tell ye, we're gittin' o' some consequence when drummers come huntin' us up. We're gittin' right into the swim." Some thought pierced Sid with terror. "Where did they come from?" His voice was sharp.

"Said they come just now f'm Belvers —"

"Belvers?"

"Yes. Sellin' goods there, I s'pose. Oh, one of 'em — curious how things comes — one of 'em knows some folks that knows the Cutlerses. They was askin' 'bout 'em; seemed ter'ble interested 'bout *Ned* —"

Sid gave an involuntary gasp. His face turned ashen.

"What's the matter," exclaimed Mr. Tibbitts. "Look 's if you was goin' to faint."

"No — just a little turn — I haven't been feeling first rate lately. I'll be better if I get out into the air."

He went out and walked slowly toward the bank, thinking deeply. Then he went to the bank door, unlocked it, and went in. No one was there. It was some time before he came out again.

CHAPTER XXXIX

PURSUIT

THE engineering corps had barely started their morning's work when Mr. Harkiss observed the watchful approach of Mr. Tibbitts' visitors of the previous day. They came close, intently eyeing each one of the group of workers, without speaking.

The engineer took a few steps forward. "You are looking for someone?"

"Yes. We'd like to speak to a young man named Ned Cutler."

Involuntarily all eyes turned toward Ned.

He paled suddenly with apprehension. Something had happened. Was it Emily?—his mother?—Priscilla?—what could it be? After an instant of palsied fear he said:

"I'm Ned Cutler; what do you want to see me for? What's happened?"

The men came on—one to either side of him. One of them as he spoke put his hand heavily on Ned's shoulder. "You're my prisoner."

"Your prisoner!" Ned was almost foolishly inarticulate from astonishment.

"Oh, come; there's some mistake."

"Why, Ned's as straight as a string!"

"You're off the main line this time."

Ned was only dimly conscious of his friends pressing around him with defenses.

The engineer now spoke gravely, with authority:

"Of course, there is a great mistake. I have known this young man for a long time. I am sure he could not have seriously transgressed the law."

"He'll have a chance to prove that in court," answered

the man, respectfully enough, but with no appearance of wavering in his intention of arrest.

Through Ned's mind was vaguely running the wonder whether Emily's parents had found out about the marriage and if he was being arrested — if he *could* be arrested for it.

"What am I being arrested for?" he demanded.

"For the death of Tina Thibeu under suspicious circumstances."

"Tina Thibeu!" Ned burst out. "Why, I never knew her — I never even *heard* of her!"

"That's all right, young man," drawled the hitherto silent man on Ned's right; "you're not expected to incriminate yourself."

"I tell you I never knew the girl!" Ned protested hotly.

"There is some grave error," said the engineer. "I should like to know on what authority you are making this arrest."

"On this warrant," said the drawly one, opening and holding up the paper so the engineer could read.

Involuntarily he started. The name, Ned Cutler, was correct. The warrant was issued in Merrence, the day after Thanksgiving.

The voluble one, with his hand gripping Ned's shoulder, broke in: "If the young man can prove an alibi his arrest will amount to nothing. Was he here, or where was he on Thanksgiving night, if he was not in Merrence?"

The engineer hesitated, confused.

Ned spoke up. "I *was* in Merrence on Thanksgiving night. But I don't know anything about Tina Thibeu."

The hand on Ned's shoulder pressed tighter. "If you weren't mixed up in this it'll be easy enough for you to account for yourself while you were in Merrence. Come, we've got to be moving."

A strange silence fell upon Ned's companions. Ned had been very noncommittal, not to say secretive about his trip to Merrence. They all instinctively recalled the strangeness of his manner after his return. Even the engineer looked troubled. Inwardly he was perturbed. He had al-

ways thought highly of Ned; but he was well aware that young men of apparently the most correct behavior were sometimes found to be mixed up in terribly shady affairs.

Ned turned to him appealingly. "Must I go, Mr. Harkiss?"

"I'm afraid you must," replied the engineer slowly; "but as this man says, you have only to prove where you were while in Merrence to clear yourself of any complicity in this affair."

To Mr. Harkiss' consternation Ned's eyes shifted and fell before his, a dull red rose, for a moment, overspreading his face, then died away, leaving him paler than before. It looked to the engineer and to all of them watching him, terribly like guilt. They could not know that Ned had other reasons for concealment of his actions during that visit to Merrence.

He moved away, involuntarily obeying the pressure on his shoulder, like one in a daze — he was forgetting to speak to any of his companions whom he was leaving. Mr. Harkiss spoke to him. "I'll get away to-morrow morning, Ned," he was saying. "I'll come over to Merrence and see how things are going."

"Thank you, sir." Ned lifted almost uncomprehending eyes to his old friend. It was plain to Mr. Harkiss that Ned's thoughts were introspective; he seemed to be revolving some problem within his mind. He went quietly with the men, still giving out that impression of inwardly considering something that troubled him.

He climbed into the sleigh which had brought the two men to the bridge, sitting between them, one driving, the other with his hand within Ned's arm, both alert against any attempt at escape; and so left the hushed, wondering group looking after them.

After awhile Ned began to talk — to question the men. Who was Tina Thibeu? What had happened to her? How had his name come to be connected with hers? What was it all about, anyway?

To all of which his two keepers refused any satisfying

answers. From the moment of Ned's acknowledgment that he had been in Merrence on Thanksgiving night, it had been a foregone conclusion with the detectives that they had got the "right man." Ned's denials, his protestations and his questionings they regarded as so many attempts at "stringing" them, and treated them accordingly, advising Ned finally to save himself the trouble of trying the baby act on them and telling him further that anything he didn't know he'd find out as soon as was good for him.

Had it not been for the unfortunate complication of his secret marriage with Emily he would have regarded the whole thing as a simply preposterous mistake, which he could easily clear up when he reached Merrence and found out what the whole thing was about. Now, he did not want to go to Merrence. In the publicity which his arrest would cause, even though innocent of whatever was charged against him, he saw the almost inevitable revealing of that secret which it would be so unfortunate for both Emily and himself to have made known.

The more he thought of it the more his conviction grew that if in any way he could prevent the marriage from becoming known he ought to do it—he *would* do it!

His blood suddenly flamed, a heat like madness swept him, rising to his brain—must he always be a passive tool of fate? Must he never let loose the fierce torrents of rebellion that shook him—that were shaking him now? Was he going to sit here like a molycoddle and be hauled to jail for something he hadn't done, when it was going to get Emmy into trouble, too? *Not while he knew how to run!*

He reached out one hand and seized the reins, pulling them up with an imperative "whoa!"

So sudden and unexpected was the movement, so sudden the stopping of the horse in his quick pace, that Ned's keepers were thrown forward in the sleigh. In that brief instant, the detective's hold loosened from his arm, Ned rose to his feet, and with one agile leap was over the back of the cutter, shouting: "I'm not going with you!" Like

a deer he was off over the fields, the two men in pursuit; but youthful lungs, a pair of long legs and hardened muscles were giving Ned the advantage. After some minutes' hard running he looked back . . . he was gaining on them . . . he saw one of the men putting his hand back to his hip pocket. Ned knew what that meant. . . . Bang! . . . the report echoed on the frosty air.

Ned dropped . . . he heard the whiz of the bullet passing to one side of him . . . he was up and off again. . . . Bang! . . . Bang! no time for dropping now; he'd have to take his chances. He was leaving them farther behind . . . there was woodland ahead — once let him reach that. Bang-bang-bang. . . . Ned felt something ping. His arm — a bullet must have grazed him, he thought. He was in the woods now; the trees were bare — they did not give the concealment that summer foliage would have done — but their trunks were shields against bullets. Ned stopped behind one of them to look back; his pursuers were pressing on. He lost no time now . . . through the woods, with all the swiftness that youth and strength and desperation could give, he went. He knew, and wondered if his pursuers did, that through the woods, and not more than a mile or so across the fields, ran a highway.

He went on, looking back now and then, listening. At the edge of the wood he paused again before venturing into the open. He could hear nothing, see nothing. He crossed the fields and reached the highway . . . he drew a long breath of relief . . . he was no longer followed.

He pressed on . . . walking . . . riding whenever someone would come along and give him a "lift" for a few miles — going, he knew not just where — only that it was not to Merrence. After hours had passed — he had not noted the number of them — he came to a trolley line. He waited until a car came along. How many miles he rode was a matter of indifference to him.

It was dark when the car stopped at a railroad station.

He did not notice the name of it . . . he felt dazed and faint . . . he had traveled far, laboring under great mental stress and he had eaten nothing since breakfast. The trolley car had been but a moment at the station when a train came in. . . . Ned mechanically boarded it and sank into a seat. . . . Presently the conductor roused him. "Ticket!"

"Oh," said Ned, fumbling in his pocket; "first stop. How much?"

"One twenty-six."

Ned gave him the money . . . he sank back in his seat, resting . . . more than two hours passed . . . then he vaguely heard the brakeman's cry: "U-n-i-o-n Junction! U-n-i-o-n Junction!" and felt the slackening of the train.

Bewildered, he got up and went out. From the station platform he saw the lights coming out in the scattered dwellings about the familiar depot. It was Union Junction! Only a few miles away was Columbia Corners . . . his home . . . his mother . . . Priscilla . . . Emily. . . . In his trouble he had come straight to them . . . he had not known it — but he had been coming back home all the time — coming with the instinct of the homing pigeon.

All the homesickness that Ned had fought down in his long, hard struggle for success overwhelmed him now. Like a great wave it rushed over him, choking him.

"Mother, mother, mother!" the word caught in his throat in a strangled sob as he plunged from the platform and set off through the darkness in the direction of the Corners.

CHAPTER XL

A NIGHT OF SURPRISES

THE winter evening was to be enlivened by a "surprise party" given to the Ben Tewksburys by their friends and acquaintances from the Corners and vicinity. As was usual in such cases, the mistress of the house had been made aware of the intended surprise in order that she might be prepared for it. Ben was the only one in the house who was not expectant of the coming event.

A fancy cloth had replaced the white one on the dining table. A big lighted lamp was in the center. The weekly newspaper lay half opened upon it. Ben's chair was drawn up to the side of the table, but he was not reading.

"What you thinkin' 'bout, Ben?"

He did not look up as he answered: "I was wonderin' how we're goin' to come out 'bout the lane. They're a long time decidin', seems to me."

"That looks to *me* 's if we was goin' to beat."

"I don't see what reason ye got fer thinkin' that."

"Jest this, Ben: If they was sat'sfied that the' should be ekal dividin' of it, they'd a-said so 'fore now."

"Well, mebbe Dan'll git it. He did fust time."

"'N' *lost* it second time fer good reason. This time they'll see't *our* verdick was *right*."

"Well — mebbe so — mebbe so." Ben's tone was still dubious, but his spirits were bolstered up by his wife's confidence; he looked up at her. "Why, ye're dressed up —" Here Mrs. Cutler and Priscilla came into the room. "So be ye all. Air ye goin' some place?"

"It's about time ye took notice o' suthin'," Mrs. Ben rallied him, good-naturedly. "Where your eyes been all day?"

"Where ye goin'?"

"No where's."

"Somebody must be comin' here, then."

"Wouldn't be *s'prised* if they was."

"It's a *s'prise party*, I'll bet; they ain't goin' t' ketch *me* 'thout my vest on!" Ben made for his bedroom.

Just then there was much suppressed noise outside the door that led into the living-room; a cautious trampling of feet, and whispers, and strangled laughter; then a knock at the door. Mrs. Ben, opening it, was greeted with a burst of laughter from the crowd of bundled and muffled women at the door, who swept in, surrounding her, Mrs. Cutler and Priscilla, shaking hands, laughing, talking, all together, a confused babble of hilarity, of enjoyment, that silenced for the time all worries, griefs, fears, lurking within the inner consciousness.

"Where's Ben? Where's Ben?" cried the laughing women.

"Oh, he's gone to slick up a bit," responded Mrs. Tewksbury; "he suspicioned suthin' jest the last minute. Where's all your men folks?"

"Gone up to the barn with the teams; they're goin' to bring in the baskets o' pervisions," said Mrs. Tibbitts.

"Guess we didn't pile *this* crowd in on ye 'thout bringin' plenty to eat," Miss Fitch remarked.

Mrs. Pettigrew laughed. "Jest after Thanksgiving's a good time fer a *s'prise party*; most ev'rybody hes a good bakin' o' pies 'n' cakes left over."

Mrs. Tuffts was gayly divesting herself of her numerous wrappings. "Mr. Tuffts 'n' I just *had* to come along with the others." She shook Mrs. Ben by the hand with a cordiality that was almost gushing.

Mrs. Ben responded, with the least hint of stiffness: "That's right, Mis' Tuffts; we're pleased t' hev ye."

The differences between the Tuffts and the Ben Tewksburys had been smoothed over. Time and the counsels of their pastor had had a little to do with appeasing Mrs. Ben's resentment, but Mr. Tuffts' defeat at the second trial had

been the principal factor. Mrs. Tewksbury, the victor, could condescend to speak to the vanquished; and the Tuffts, fallen from their high estate, were only too glad to be once more upon even the outer fringe of intimacy with the Ben Tewksburys.

The women, young and old, were now scattering over the house — upstairs to leave their wraps, in the parlor, in the kitchen. Lamps, filled, trimmed and ready for the match, began to be lighted, here, there and everywhere about the house until it stood forth, a big illumination against the wintry landscape.

When the men came, stamping the snow from their feet, laden with generous baskets, there was another babble of talk. Ben came out of his room, dressed for the occasion, with greetings for everyone. Mrs. Ben, Mrs. Cutler and Priscilla were helping with baskets, coats, mufflers and caps.

"We'd best take all the baskets into the kitchen pantry," said Mrs. Ben.

"I'll help ye," said Miss Fitch, good-naturedly.

"Yes, so'll I," chimed in Mrs. Tibbitts.

"What d'ye think, Mis' Tewksb'ry!" exclaimed Mrs. Tibbitts, pausing as she was about to pass out into the kitchen; "you'll never guess if ye tried a hunderd times whose comin', mebbe."

"If I can't guess, ye better tell me who 'tis; ye've got my curiosity excited, Mis' Tibbitts."

"Well, it's Jestice Withersp'n."

"The Jestice! that *is* s'prisin'; I didn't know the Jestice ever free-quented parties 'round here."

Mrs. Pettigrew shook with half-suppressed laughter. "We've all been wonderin' whether the Jedge is gittin' love er religion."

The commotion of another arrival distracted the attention of those assembled. It was Mr. and Mrs. Peabody with Emily, and following them the Judge.

Mrs. Pettigrew's glance roved from Emily to the Judge. She had seen the Judge talking to Emily two or three

times. She chuckled delightedly. She was putting what she thought two and two together.

Sid came in to greet the latest arrivals. Sounds of laughing and playing on the piano came from the front room.

"Take Emily into the parlor with the young folks, Sid," said his mother, looking after them with pride as they walked away together.

"We came for a little while," said Mrs. Peabody; "but Mr. Peabody isn't strong enough to stay up very late."

"It's too bad. I'm ter'ble sorry Mr. Peabody's feelin' poorly." Mrs. Tewksbury hastened to pull forward a comfortable rocker for Mr. Peabody. "But *Emily* don't need to hurry 'bout goin'—Sid'll take her home; it's jest a beautiful night fer a sleigh ride."

The Judge was making himself quite at home. If love had brought him, he gave no sign of his preference. Old women and young ones, married and single, all were greeted alike with genial impartiality; as for religion, of course, everybody knew that was just Lib Pettigrew's way of putting things. Secretly, Mrs. Tewksbury thought that the Judge believed, had perhaps even received private intelligence, that they were to get a favorable verdict about the lane and he wanted to get on "the right side of them." He had not wanted them to go to law; he had certainly favored "Dan'l"; now, "he was comin' 'round, wanting to be friendly"; it must be that they were going to get the lane—just as she knew they would if they stood up for their rights. She grew quite flushed with the thought of her triumph. Her step became more dominant, her spirits buoyant.

"Mariar's in great feather," whispered Mrs. Tibbitts to Mrs. Pettigrew.

That lady laughed. "The's always a moultin' time," she answered jocosely.

The strains of a waltz being played upon the piano came through the open door of the parlor. The young folks were dancing there. From the kitchen came weird, ear-

splitting screeches from fiddle strings being tuned for "lancers."

Chairs in the kitchen had been ranged against the wall; the two fiddlers, stationed at one end of the room, were soon plying their bows; two sets of dancers formed in the big room and over the bare, white scoured floor the dancers "tripped the light fantastic toe." In this case the steps were sometimes truly fantastic, though not always light.

Here again Judge Witherspoon surprised everyone. He danced. He danced first with Mrs. Ben; he danced with Miss Fitch, with Mrs. Tibbitts, with Mrs. Pettigrew; then he danced with Priscilla; after that he gathered with a little group of men in the dining-room.

"Danced yerself out, Jedge?" asked one of the little knot.

"Pretty near," the Judge answered, with his hearty laugh. "Boys will be boys, they say; but old men have got to be old men, whether they will or no."

"By gum!" said another; "seems t' *me* some o' the boys these days air the oldest men ye kin find, 'n' some o' the old men—hev ye seen Sam Goslin lately? He's hop-pin' 'round livelier 'n' any kid in Columby Corners."

"It's a wonder he ain't here to-night," said another.

"Must be settin' up with Widder Lunn; don't see her here, nuther," said the first speaker.

Lively strains from the piano in the parlor and industrious squeakings from the fiddles in the kitchen rose and wrestled with one another in air; voices swelling in talk or laughter filled in the gaps, mounting higher at times than the skirmish line of music. Women, taking turns from the dancing, were setting the table in the dining-room. Its fancy spread had been removed. It had been drawn to its full length with extra "leaves" inserted and covered with snowy napery. Down its length three great lamps with fancy shades added brilliancy to the feast which was being spread. Plates of bread and biscuits; platters of cut cold meats; dishes of pickles and jellies; whole pies of

various sorts; frosted cakes cut and set on intact in their shape; all were being spread by the busy women, going back and forth from dining-room to kitchen pantry. The aromatic fumes of coffee diffused a comforting sense of the nearness of "eating time" to appetites sharpened by the ride in the crisp, cold night air and vigorous feats in terpsichorean and conversational exercises.

Mr. Peabody had left his easy rocker. Any chair now seemed equal to his infirmities. He was even walking and standing about, laughing and talking with the Judge and others. He had forgotten his ills. He and the Judge had shifted about until they stood at the door of the parlor. Dr. Bullock's daughter was at the piano. Three or four couples were waltzing, rather carefully, the dimensions of the room not allowing much abandon.

Emily and Sid were dancing together. The eyes of both Mr. Peabody and the Justice followed them. Mr. Peabody looked up and saw the direction of the Judge's glance. An impulse of confidence toward this strong and vital man came over him.

"They're a nice-looking young couple—well matched, don't you think so? We want to see them partners for life."

"*We?*" the Judge interrogated, his eyes still upon the waltzing couple.

"That is, Emily's mother and myself; and, of course, *Sid* and *his* folks."

"Emily, too?" The Judge turned a large, questioning gaze full upon Mr. Peabody. That gentleman grew disturbed.

"That's the only trouble. Emily's acting skittish about it; we don't just understand why."

The Judge's attention had fixed itself again on Emily's fresh, fair face. His heart warmed to her. She was "true blue." Her preference for Ned might be unwise—from a material standpoint—but she was sticking to it like a major. "Well," he answered Mr. Peabody with deliberation, "when a hoss that's always gone straight 'n' easy t'

the bit takes to shyin', I don't try t' urge her ahead too fast. I gen'ally find out she's got some good reason for side-steppin'."

At this moment there was a commotion at the side door leading into the dining-room. Hurried feet were stamping off the snow; several loud, nervous rappings heralded the arrival of some belated comer and the door opened to admit old man Goslin and Mrs. Lunn. They were greeted with an outburst of merriment and pounced upon by several of the women, who began to unwind them from their wraps. As soon as Mr. Goslin was freed from the muffler about his mouth and throat he began in his shrill treble, his nodding head almost lost in his big fur cap, which someone finally lifted from his little, bald cranium.

"S'prised to see us, ain't ye? Yes — jesso — jesso. Passon Phelps here? Yes — jesso — jesso. Jedge Withersp'n here? Yes — jesso — jesso. Wonderin' what we want o' the passon er the Jestice I s'pose? Yes — jesso — jesso."

Mrs. Lunn's tall, spare figure and large-boned, sallow features now stood forth in all the trying splendor of a new lavender silk gown with white lace trimmings. In her deep contralto voice she announced dramatically, almost with solemn defiance: "We have kem to git married!"

"We've e-l-o-p-e-d! Got the start o' them childern o' mine, didn't we? Yes — jesso — jesso."

"We've bean to the parson's house 'n' to the hotel fer the Jestice; seein' nobody was to home, 'n' everybody was here, 'n' me 'n' Mr. Goslin was *pree-pared*, we kem right on here fer the ceremony." Mrs. Lunn gave her explanation with much dignity. "We didn't s'pose the'd be no objections by nobody here."

"Passon! Better splice us jes' ez quick ez ye kin, 'fore them childern o' mine gits after me. By gum! guess I'm of age, ain't I? 'N' kin vote er git married 'thout askin' them, can't I? Yes — jesso — jesso."

The news had spread throughout the house and the dining-room had filled to overflowing with the curious friends

of the would-be bride and groom. Mrs. Ben pressed forward.

"Step right into the parlor, Mis' Lunn an' Mr. Goslin," she said; "the best in the house ain't too good fer a bride 'n' groom."

"Jesso — jesso," assented Mr. Goslin, offering his arm to the towering Mrs. Lunn. A fancied noise at the door made him jump and clutch at Mrs. Lunn nervously. "I thought that was the children after me."

"Be ca'am," Mrs. Lunn reassured him; "be caa-am; we're in the hands o' Providence now."

"Jesso — yes — jesso."

The simple ceremony was quickly over, without interruption from the dreaded children, or otherwise. The fiddles squeaked vainly in the kitchen; everyone was crowding to shake hands with the newly-wedded pair.

Justice Witherspoon pressed forward. "Sam, if ye'd found me home to-night to marry you, it'd been my privilege to kiss the bride; don't know but I'll claim it anyway."

"Yes — jesso — jesso, Jedge; that's all right on this occasion, but dumm me, I don't want t' ketch no man foolin' 'round fer kisses after t'-night."

Mrs. Goslin held herself with becoming austerity as that man of doubtful reputation — Justice Witherspoon — gallantly pressed her leathered cheek.

Mrs. Pettigrew sat down, weak with laughter. "The diffickwilty'll be," she said, drying the tears from her eyes, "which one o' you two's goin' to hev most reason fer bein' jealous. I advise ye, Mis' Lunn — Mis' Goslin, I should say, t' keep yer weather eye on the wimmin when Sam's around."

"Seem's t' me it ain't a mite like a weddin' 'less the's some singin'," Mrs. Tibbitts' mild voice rose in beseeching complaint.

Mr. Goslin acquiesced with alacrity. "We don't want to miss none o' the trimmins' — the Columby Corner's quartette's here, ain't it? Yes — jesso — jesso."

"Certainly the quartette is here." It was Mrs. Tuffts

who spoke. Mr. Tuffts was bass in the quartette and Mrs. Tuffts never missed an opportunity of exploiting what she considered his extraordinarily fine accomplishments. "I don't know, though, as they have their notes with them. Philo, have the quartette got any of their notes with them?"

"Why—ah, the quartette is not entirely unprepared to oblige—ah, though we may not have anything suited to the bridal nature of the occasion—ah."

"We sprung a ma'ch on ye, didn't we? Hev t' git up early t' ketch us young fellers, don't ye? Yes—jesso—jesso."

"Fire away, Tuffts," the Judge encouraged; "whatever music ye've got, we want to hear it."

A murmur of assent rose urgently from an expectant audience. The quartette, with conscious smiles, began to untangle itself from the others, and finally lined up for execution. Mrs. Tibbitts was the contralto. She had not a bad voice, of rather unexpected volume—in contrast with the small calibre of her speaking voice—and she sang with a constant appearance as of surprise at hearing the sounds issuing from her own mouth. Miss Fitch was the soprano. Miss Fitch was remarkable for the daring with which she attacked the high notes. She sometimes missed them by a greater or less distance, but when she struck one full in the middle, the quartette felt itself covered with glory. Mr. Tibbitts was not "exactly a tenner, ner yet a barry-tone," as he expressed it, but he was "sort o' betwixt 'n' between." Secretly he felt that his voice had needed only early training to have made him a world-famed tenor. He held his music close under his nose, his bulging near-sighted eyes, slightly crossed, wandering back and forth in search of his notes, while his cheeks puffed in a valiant struggle for breath.

Mr. Tuffts was the bass. His voice was truly terrible in its occasional depths—over which he loved to linger. When he had reached the bottom of the seemingly bottomless, he held on—as if it were impossible to let go. This he contrived to do as often as possible and when, at the end

of a concerted number, his voice lingered on after the others had ceased, sinking down, down, and ending in a subterranean "ah!" the effect was edifying.

After several selections had been received with flattering applause, word went round that supper was ready. There was a general, not to say eager, movement, toward the dining-room. About the big table as many gathered as could be seated, the bride and groom being pressed into places of honor. The young people and all whom the table could not accommodate, took plates, heaped with good things, and fragrant cups of coffee, away from the big table to cozy corners, little tables, even upon the stairs.

Mrs. Cutler and Priscilla were here and there, seeing that all were helped bountifully; Mrs. Ben, too, though seated at the head of the table, had watchful eyes over everything. Suddenly a deafening racket, a pandemonium of sounds, tin horns blown shrilly, bells clanged, tin pans beaten, assailed the ears of the feasters. The noises came from outside the dining-room and through the bay window fleeting glimpses were caught of elfish, grinning faces and agile, dodging bodies.

"What's that?" exclaimed Mrs. Ben in consternation.

"It's them boys that was follerin' us in the village," the now Mrs. Goslin ejaculated in indignation; "they orto be spanked 'n' put t' bed. They got a lot more boys with 'em; they're boun' t' pester us."

Mr. Goslin showed signs of trepidation. "S'pose they heerd us askin' fer Passon 'n' the Jestice? Yes—jesso—jesso. S'pose they guessed what we was up to? Yes—jesso—jesso—"

The din increased, helped out by numerous yells, cat calls and piercing whistles.

"Ben!" commanded Mrs. Tewksbury; "you go to the door 'n' tell 'em if they don't git away ye'll sick the dog onto 'em."

Ben rose obediently and started for the door, with an air of belligerent intent. He opened it a little way and shouted

authoritatively: "Now, see here, boys! you git out er I'll sick —"

A big ball of softly rolled snow struck Mr. Tewksbury somewhere in the region of the chin, filling his mouth and bespattering his face and chest with a shower of puffy white. He shut the door quickly, spluttering and brushing himself free from the snow.

"Well, did you ever?" Mild-eyed Mrs. Tibbitts could not further express her indignation.

"I declare!" exclaimed Mrs. Ben, wrathfully; "them hoodlums is ter'ble; whut's the ust o' hev'in' a Jestice o' the Peace here, if we can't hev law 'n' order?"

"That's so, Mis' Tewksb'ry," exclaimed the Judge, rising ponderously from his place at the table; "I'll hev to fix them boys."

As his big form filled the doorway, there was a scurrying to cover in the presence of the representative of the law. "Look here, you boys," he called out in his big voice; "ain't you ashamed o' yourselves? Now you go 'round to the back door 'n' git some pie 'n' cake 'n' then you *vamoose*."

Priscilla slipped into the kitchen, smothering her laughter, and on the bench outside the door set a number of pies and a heaping dish of cake. One joyful blast of horns announced the discovery of the good things. The old bobbed they had left standing near the barn was soon swarming with its lusty passengers. The "shiverree" was over; its perpetrators had found more satisfying occupation.

"Well, I declare!" cried Mrs. Ben; "that's *one* way o' preservin' peace 'n' order, I must say."

"Yes'm," the Judge replied heartily; "peace is a cur'us thing. Sometimes it's preserved by usin' salt er vinegar er pepper; sometimes the' won't nothin' do it but gunpowder, 'n' then agin the best thing in the world is a little honey. Thing is t' know jest *which* one of 'em t' use."

Miss Fitch was making herself agreeable, passing edibles from one to another. "Do hev a little more o' this chicken, Mr. Goslin," she was urging; "it's reel tasty."

"Yes — jesso — jesso; don't keer if I do."

"What part do you pree-fer, Mr. Goslin?"

"I don't keer — it's all hen t' me."

"I'll give ye some o' the bosom — it'll be softer chewin'."

"Yes — jesso — jesso."

"Now eat all ye kin — *dew*, Mr. Goslin."

The erstwhile Mrs. Lunn's deep voice here rolle' impressively through the room: "No, thank ye, Mis' Tibbits, I don't feel like nothin' hearty. I'll jest try a piece o' that leming pie; the meringgew onto it looks beautiful."

"Ma!" Mrs. Phelps' eldest boy wormed his way close to her side. "Ma! I forgot the clean pocket handkerchief you told me to bring to take some cake home in."

His disappointed, sepulchral whisper reached Mrs. Tibbits' ears. "Never mind," she consoled him; "I've got an extry one, 'n' I'll let ye hev the loan of it."

As all things come to an end, so at last did the supper. Dancing was resumed with renewed vigor; the women again "took turns," clearing the table, though Mrs. Cutler and Priscilla urged them to leave that work to them.

"Ye know I'm too old to dance, 'n' Priscilla don't keer much about it; you may jest as well go 'n' hev a good time."

So, after some of the dishes and remainders of food had been removed, Mrs. Cutler and Priscilla were left to finish the clearing away. Priscilla had gone out with her hands full of piled plates and saucers. Ben Tewksbury was still in the dining-room talking to a neighboring farmer. As they arose to follow the others into the kitchen, Mrs. Cutler heard the man say: "I may's well give ye the twenty dollars I owe ye yit on that Jersey cow; guess you must a-ben thinkin' I'd forgot it."

"No," Ben answered; "I ain't been worryin' 'bout it. I kin use it all right though, if ye've got it to spare."

The twenty dollars were counted out to Ben. He went over to the big dresser and unlocked the bottom drawer, carefully placing the money within it. Ben had used this

drawer for many years as a safety deposit vault for all private papers, particular letters, money — in fact, anything that he desired to keep with care and secrecy. He kept it locked at all times and even Mrs. Ben was not allowed access to it except at such times as Ben saw fit.

Mrs. Ben had never offered any protest. She had allowed Ben to rest secure in his fancied authority. When she wished to examine the contents of the drawer she removed the one next above it. Mrs. Cutler smiled a little as she thought of this and noticed how particular Ben was about re-locking it.

He and the neighbor then went out into the kitchen where the crowd was.

Mrs. Cutler stood at the doorway, looking in. They were all in the great kitchen now, young folks and old folks.

As she looked, her soft eyes dimmed. If she could only see Ned there among them all, having a good time. . . . Priscilla was gone a long while — they must be washing up some of the dishes in the pantry.

She went over by the bay window in the dining-room and sat down to rest for a few minutes. The shades were up — she could see out into the side yard. She became aware at last of a figure standing there, making motions to her. She half started up in fear. The figure advanced with a gesture of caution. It came nearer, nearer. She could see the face — *Ned's* face. She would have cried out, but his finger was on his lips for silence. The drawn whiteness of his face paralyzed her. For an instant she stood, unable to speak or move; then she ran to the door, out upon the step.

"Ned! Ned!" she called faintly. "Oh, is it you? Come — come here —"

He was close to her now — holding her hands tight.

"What's the matter, Ned? Air ye sick? Has suthin' happened?" she panted, drawing him into the room and closing the door. "What ye doin' here like this, Ned?"

"I'm running away, mother."

"Runnin' away! Oh, Ned, what ye been doin'?"

"I haven't been doing anything, mother, not anything to be arrested for—"

"Ned! ye ain't been *arrested*?"

"They were taking me to jail, mother, for something I'd never done—some girl had been killed they said—and I'd had a hand in it some way—oh, but it wasn't so, mother." He held her hands tight again as she caught her breath and her body wavered as if she would fall. His arm about her, he steadied her, seating her again in the rocker, sinking down beside her and speaking fast, close to her ear. "I didn't know what it was about . . . but I couldn't tell them where I was at the time—for a reason . . . for a good reason—I can't even tell *you*! . . . but I got away from them . . . and I ran . . . and ran . . . I didn't think where I was going but all the time I was coming back to you. . . . I've got to go somewhere and hide . . . until they find out who did it . . . but I had to come here first. . . . I wanted you to know . . . no matter what you hear . . . no matter what they say about me . . . that I'm all right. . . . I didn't hurt anyone. . . . I didn't even know the girl. . . . I wasn't going to let them put me in jail—"

Mrs. Cutler's trembling hand was moving over and over Ned's head, smoothing his hair caressingly, her pale lips murmuring: "My boy . . . my boy . . . my boy. . . ."

"You believe me, mother, don't you? It can't be long before it's cleared up—you believe me?"

"I believe ye, Ned . . . I believe ye . . . where ye goin' to go?"

"I don't know—I hadn't thought yet—but I'll be all right—and I've got to go now . . . there's a party here to-night? . . . only for that I guess I wouldn't have seen you . . . but I'd better go . . . before any of the people here see me . . . good-bye, mother . . . and don't worry . . . it'll come out all right . . . good-bye. . . ."

"Ned!—how ye going to git along? *Hev ye got any money?*"

"Now don't worry about that, mother . . . I'll get along all right—"

"Ye haven't got none!—I knowed ye couldn't hev. Ye can't git along 'less ye hev money— they'll be sure to git ye agin—"

Her voice thrilled with poignant anguish. Guilty or innocent, her boy should not be in prison. "If I on'y hed some t' give ye — if I could on'y git some! Ned — the Judge is here, he'll help ye, he'll give ye money — I'll git him, Ned," she was going toward the kitchen.

Ned stopped her. "No, mother—I mustn't ask the Judge—I can't explain to him—I don't want to see him now—I only wanted to see *you*."

A sick fear clutched Mrs. Cutler's heart. Why didn't Ned want to see the Judge—his best friend? No matter, innocent or guilty, she must help her boy. All at once she was conscious of the dresser against which she was leaning. She started and her eyes sought the lower drawer; for an instant she struggled with herself; then she pulled out the drawer next above the lower one, put in her hand and withdrew the roll of bills Ben had so carefully locked there a short time before; she replaced the drawer hastily and slipped quickly to Ned's side.

"Here's some money," she whispered tremulously; "'tain't much, but it'll help." She tried to press it into his hand.

"It's Uncle Ben's," objected Ned, drawing back.

"No," she answered fiercely, "it's *mine*!" and forced it into his hand. The sweat of terror was beading her thin temples. "Mebbe ye better go, Ned, 'fore anyone comes —"

"I'd ruther give it to ye now, Jedge," Ben was in the doorway, coming from the kitchen, the Justice with him. Mrs. Cutler, at the first sound of Ben's voice, had pressed Ned into a chair and stood in front of him, screening him from sight.

Ben went directly to the dresser, taking the key of the drawer from his pocket. Mrs. Cutler watched him in a sort of fascinated terror. Stooping down laboriously, he unlocked the drawer, speaking the while to the Judge.

"Nathan'l Martin gin it to me to-night; he'd been owin' it fer quite a spell on a Jersey cow I let 'im hev. It'll jest make up what I was shy on that las' six months' int'rest." He was feeling around for the money. "I want to pay it to ye 'n' git it off my mind—where is it? It ain't here! I put it in this draw not ten minutes ago 'n' now 'tain't here—" His voice was rising in excitement. He straightened up, looking at Mrs. Cutler. "*You* was here when I put the money Nathan'l Martin give me in that draw, wan't ye?"

"Yes, Ben—"

"Ye been here ever sense?"

"Yes, Ben—"

"Then who come in here 'n' took that money?"

". . . Ben . . ."

"Who kem in here—that's what I want to know!"

". . . No one—Ben—"

"That's what I thought—it's *you* that's took it. Robbin' yer own brother! Robbin' the brother that's feedin' ye, 'n' feedin' yer daughter—robbin' me t' send it to that good-fer-nothin' boy o' your'n, I s'pose—"

Ben's angry voice had risen higher and louder; it was heard above the squeaking of the fiddles and the talking and the laughter; the guests were crowding into the dining-room, filling up the doorway, open-mouthed, astonished, curious.

"See here, Ben," the Judge interposed, hastily; "jest let it drop now; the money's mislaid somehow, 'n' I ain't in no hurry fer it—"

"Let it *drop*? When I ketch a thief in my own house?"

Priscilla, pushing through the doorway, followed by Mrs. Ben herself, caught sight of her mother, white, trembling, standing at bay before the furious glances and words of Ben.

"Mother! What's the matter?"

"Matter," Ben answered quickly; "matter enough; she's been found out stealin' my money."

Here Ned rose from the chair behind his mother, putting her gently to one side. "You're wrong," he said, going over to Ben and holding out the money; "*I took it.*"

"Ned!" cried Priscilla.

A hushed murmur ran over the assemblage. Emily, standing with Sid in the kitchen, just behind the crowd, gave a low choking cry: "Oh, Ned."

The Judge stepped forward. His gaze swept Mrs. Cutler's and Ned's faces. He was puzzled. "What is it, Ned?" he said; "what brought you back here?"

The outer door opened quickly and "William I. Brown" and his companion detective entered. They stepped at once to Ned — one at his right and the other at his left.

"You couldn't lose us," said Mr. William I. Brown, jocularly. In a twinkling the silent one had snapped the handcuffs on Ned's wrists.

"What's it for?" demanded the Judge.

"Suspected murder."

"Who?"

"A girl — Tina Thibeau."

"Where?"

"Near Merrence."

"When?"

"Well, some time between Thanksgiving, 8:30 o'clock and the next morning —"

"Thanksgiving! Why, Ned!" Emily had forced her way through the people at the door.

Ned looked at her steadily. "It's all a mistake — it'll come out all right."

Mrs. Peabody drew Emily back.

"A mistake," broke in Mrs. Ben; "a mistake! — of course you'd say, comin' back here like a bad penny when I told yer mother 'n' yer sister ye mustn't never step yer foot inside the door —"

"Mariar —" pleaded Mrs. Cutler.

"Oh, Aunt Maria! Oh, Uncle Ben!" Priscilla turned pitifully, helplessly from one to the other in tearful pleading — Priscilla — whom no one in all that gathering had ever before seen meet misfortune with other than a brave and smiling face.

"Don't 'Uncle Ben' 'n' 'Aunt Mariar' us no more — none of ye! Ye've been a care 'n' a burden to us all yer lives, 'n' now yer layin' our heads low with the shame 'n' disgrace yer bringin' onto us. Stealin', 'n' murder, 'n' mebbe hangin', 'n' my boy, my Sid, that's riz himself up t' be an ornament t' the community, 'n' to his fambly, he'll hev to suffer 'n' be 'shamed before folks fer the disgrace heaped onto us by that good-fer-nothin' scalawag, Ned Cutler —"

Judge Witherspoon's slow gathering wrath here broke forth, shattering Mrs. Ben from her pedestal of self-righteousness. "*Darn* these hens with one chicken," he vociferated. "Priscilla, git yer hood 'n' yer shawl, 'n' git yer *Ma's* hood 'n' shawl. As fer *you*," turning to the officers, "you 'n' yer prisoner come along with us — I guess the's room in the Putnam House fer us all to-night!"

"Jedge!" Mrs. Ben drew herself up and backward with mighty indignation.

"Onderstand *me*," the Judge brought his hand down on the table with thundering emphasis; "I'm takin' care o' this fam'ly now, 'n' I'm goin' to see 'em through — if it rains hell fire 'n' scissors!"

CHAPTER XLI

REVELATION

THE cold gray of the winter morning was forcing its way through the chinks of the shades at the windows of the Putnam House parlor. Priscilla rose from the chair in which she had been for a little while resting. She turned out the light that was burning and put up the shades.

The two detectives were in the room, one wide awake, the other napping. They had taken turns in watching their prisoner through the hours of waiting for daylight. Judge Witherspoon sat silent, thinking, in the only chair in the room that was large enough to accommodate his generous proportions. Ned alone was sleeping. Stretched on the lounge he had sunk into the oblivion of exhaustion.

In a small bedroom opening from the parlor, Mrs. Cutler had at last fallen into fitful slumber.

The strain and excitement of the night's events had brought her to the verge of nervous collapse. She had been put to bed at once upon their arrival at the hotel and had only been calmed by Priscilla's untiring efforts.

Over and over again Priscilla reassured her. "Judge Witherspoon is going to look out for Ned; don't you worry a bit about it."

"But they'll take Ned away; they'll lock him up in the jail. He'll never git over that, Priscilla; people never'll fergit it."

"Of course they'll forget it when they know it's all a mistake," Priscilla stoutly asserted, though with a sinking heart. Too well she knew how the scent of the jail hung around even the wrongfully imprisoned. And Ned — Ned had been away from them for a good while now, and he was young; how did they know what company he might

have fallen into; if he would only say what had taken him to Merrence that night — but here Priscilla pulled herself back to her allegiance. It was a mistake — it *must* be a mistake; Ned was innocent.

“Is the Jedge goin’ with Ned, did ye say?” Mrs. Cutler had started up in the bed again. “Air ye *sure* he’s goin’ with him?”

“Yes, *sure*. When the Judge says he’ll do anything, he does it.”

“What we goin’ to do, Priscilla, when Ned’s gone? Hev we got to go back to Mariar’s?”

“No, Ma.”

“I don’t want to go to Dan’ll’s, neither.”

“No, you don’t have to.”

“Why can’t we go to Merrence? I’d like to be close to Ned if he —”

“Now, see here, Ma; don’t you worry so. I don’t know where we’re going, nor what we’re going to do; but we’ll never go back to Uncle Dan’ll’s nor Uncle Ben’s; I’ll work for somebody else before I’ll eat their bread again, or let you, either.”

“What’s Ned doin’ now, Priscilla,” this anxiously.

Priscilla looked out into the parlor. “He’s lying on the lounge; I guess he’s going to sleep. I wish *you’d* go to sleep, your so upset; it would do you more good than anything else. Come now, won’t you try?”

“If I drop off to sleep ye won’t let ’em take Ned away ’thout wakin’ me, will ye?”

“No, I promise you.”

So Mrs. Cutler had tried to sleep, only to start up again to go over and over some phase of this thing that had come upon them, until at last, like Ned, from sheer exhaustion, she was finally overcome by the merciful oblivion of sleep.

The Judge, rousing mentally to the approach of day, knew that the inaction of the room could last but little longer. He, with the officers and Ned, were to drive to Belvers to catch the first train stopping there which would let them off at Merrence. They must start by eight o’clock;

it would be that by the time they were through breakfast. He spoke now to the one who was on watch. "You'd best be getting breakfast. We won't have any time to waste if we're going to make that train."

The sleeping detective was roused to stand guard while his companion went down stairs to coffee and whatever else the Putnam House had to offer for its morning meal.

"Ye'd better go down, Priscilla. A cup o' coffee'll do ye good."

"Not now, thank you, Judge; I don't think I could swallow it."

The Judge went to Ned, looking at him a moment reflectively, before he stooped to wake him. "Ned! Ned!" he said gently. Ned started up, a little wildly. "It's all right, my boy." His hand rested reassuringly on Ned's shoulder. "We've got to be starting pretty soon; it's time for ye to wake up. I'll have 'em fetch ye up some breakfast; I guess Priscilla'll take a cup o' coffee with ye, 'n' mebbe yer ma will, too." With that he went down stairs, and after giving the order for a bountiful supply of coffee, toast and eggs, to be sent up to the Cutler family, he addressed himself to his own meal.

Curious glances were cast at him and at the detective, but no one ventured any questions.

The gathering of the night before had embraced nearly everyone of sufficient importance to know the Tewksburys, and had included the landlord of the Putnam House and most of those present in the dining-room.

They had heard Justice Witherspoon's remarkable declaration for the Cutlers, which they were even yet digesting, and discretion suggested to them that the less said to him this morning, the better.

As he ate his breakfast the Judge was oblivious to whispers and side looks. He was forming such plans as he could for Ned's defense. He was too much in the dark himself yet to plan very effectively. Beyond the fact that a girl, by name, Tina Thibau, had been discovered dead under suspicious circumstances, and that there was evi-

dence connecting Ned Cutler directly with the fact, he could glean nothing from the detectives. Between themselves they had decided that Judge Witherspoon, being a man keen in the law, and evidently a staunch friend of the suspect, was a man to be distrusted. They feared some coup on his part that might interfere between them and the delivery of their captive—a blow to their professional pride which they meant not to invite by undue confidences. In answer to the Judge's promptings they had finally flatly told him that he must wait for further information from the police authorities in Merrence.

Nor was he more successful with Ned. Ned confessed that he had been in Merrence on Thanksgiving night and a part of the following morning; but as to his reasons for going there or his actions while there he maintained absolute silence, beyond vehemently denying any connection with or knowledge of Tina Thibeuau—living or dead.

And here was where the Judge was troubled. He knew that Ned was concealing something, he felt that any approach to the subject assured a feeling of nervousness and anxiety in Ned, yet there was a ring of truth in his denials, at least so it seemed to him, although the detectives heard nothing but the customary subterfuge of the guilty. The Judge came to the conclusion, with the last mouthfuls of his breakfast, that not much was to be done until their arrival upon the scene of the tragedy; then, well—Ned should have the benefit of all he could do for him, innocent or not, on account of—his thoughts flew to the parlor above and hovered about Priscilla and the pathetic figure in the little parlor bedroom.

The detective had finished his meal and was going out of the door. The Judge rose to follow him, stopping long enough to vouchsafe this much to the landlord: "I'm goin' over to Merrence with the boy—you put Mis' Cutler 'n' her daughter into the best room you've got 'n' look after 'em till I git back. We've known this fambly fer a long spell, Joel—sense before Cutler was put under sod, 'n' 'twon't hurt me ner you t' be a little considerate of 'em now,

'Tween you 'n' me they've hed about all the badgerin' they kin stand up under."

"All right, Jedge, I'll 'commodate 'em, I'll have my wife see that they got everything they want to be 'comf'table.'" The detective was up the front stairs, the Judge just leaving the office to follow him. At that moment, a big double bobsleigh, drawn by a pair of reeking horses, stopped before the door and a dozen or more men with angry eyes and determined faces poured through the front door of the hotel. They were led by Thibeau, who was closely followed by big brawny Gene, his eyes sunken now but glittering like sparks of fire in his pallid face.

It was Thibeau who spoke, as by authority. His voice was a hoarse shriek but every word came tipped with desperate resolve that was backed by the stern mouths and straining muscles of the men behind him.

"Where is he? — that Ned Cutler?" he cried frenziedly. "*We want him!*" Is it not so?" turning toward the men behind him.

A grim, growling murmur of assent answered him as the men pressed closer.

"Give him to us, or we will tear him from you! He has destroyed my Tina — Oh, mon Dieu — My Tina! His life I will have, it belongs to me!"

The detective had stopped halfway up the stairs, listening. As Thibeau finished he turned, springing quickly and lightly as he could up the stairs, but Gene's eyes, narrowed to lines of fire, saw him.

"Look!" he cried, pointing, "he's going to tell him!" As one man the crowd was up the stairs after the detective. Nothing but bullets could have stopped that vengeful rush. Seeing them coming, the detective ran to the top of the stairs, down the hall. He burst into the parlor, white, nerved for battle. He turned to lock the door — there was no key.

He jumped to the side of the amazed Ned, grasping his arm firmly with his left hand, drawing his revolver with

the other. "Quick, your gun," he shouted to his companion; "they're after him."

Priscilla, terrified, fled to the door leading into the room where her mother lay, still sleeping. The mad tramp of feet came on down the hall, the door flew open—the impetus of the crowd carried them into the room. They faced the leveled revolvers.

"Not a step nearer, or we'll shoot."

In the instant of dead silence and indecision, Judge Witherspoon pushed through the crowd.

"That young man," he said, sternly addressing the crowd, "is in the hands of the law and the law alone must punish him if he is guilty."

"But," said Thibeau, looking about puzzled, "we do not want *him*, we want *Ned Cutler*."

"I am Ned Cutler," here Ned burst forth in sheer exasperation, "and I don't know what in the world you are after me for."

Thibeau moved a step forward, his lip hanging loosely, his finger crooked and pointing at Ned. "*You*, is it you they have got?"

His pointing finger dropped and throwing back his head he broke into a wild laugh of derision. Then he spoke again. "No, no, no, no, you are not the one! and Gene here—he tell me the police they have got the man who destroyed my Tina! o-h-uh—" his voice rose in a crescendo of rage, disappointment and scorn as he lifted and shook his clenched fists at the detectives—"d-a-m-n fools!"

Thibeau's declaration of Ned's innocence had run around the room like an electric shock. The chagrined detectives had dropped their guns and their prisoner at the same time. Priscilla had run to Ned and thrown her arms about his neck. The Judge had taken him by the hand.

"My boy," he said, with a wonderful relief in his voice; "it's all over, you're cleared all right."

Ned, bewildered, wiped away the moisture that was gathering on his brow. "I don't understand yet how I got

mixed up in it, but I'm not sorry it's over. It's been pretty tough, Judge."

"And I'm going to confess right now, Ned, I'm ashamed of it, but I didn't feel so sure — *all the time* — but what ye did know something about it. I was goin' to stand by ye, though."

"That's all right, Judge," his hand answered to the clasp of the Judge's. "I know things looked a little suspicious for me."

"Ye'd best go and tell your ma," said the Justice, releasing Ned's hand.

They found her still asleep — through the closed door not even the excitement of the scene just passed had penetrated the lethargy which had claimed her tired body and spirit.

Slowly the crowd went down the stairs and out onto the piazza of the hotel, their mien subdued.

"Of course," the detectives said to Justice Witherspoon, "*we're* convinced this young fellow isn't the one, but it's a question whether we ought not to take him to headquarters before releasing him."

The Judge took them by the arm. "Come downstairs and we'll talk over what's best to be done, you're too late to ketch the train you were going on anyway, so there's no need for ye to hurry."

When they got downstairs, the men were still standing upon the piazza, hesitating, dissatisfied with the failure of their errand, wondering what Thibeu could do now. Thibeu, his head hanging, stood a picture of helpless despair, the slow tears rolling down his cheeks.

"I want to talk to him a minute," said the Judge, leaving the detectives.

"See here, my good man, what is this about your daughter? I'd like to know all about it, and how you came to get hold of that name, Ned Cutler."

Thibeu looked up, and at the sight of the Judge's kindly face, poured forth the whole story, with many broken exclamations and bitter imprecations.

When he was done the Judge was still puzzled. Could there be another one of Ned's name?

It was here that Thibeu's gaze, wandering about hopelessly, happened to rest upon the glass case of photographs in front of the photographer's gallery next door to the Putnam House; wandered over and then fixed itself there, startled. The pictured face of Sid Tewksbury was before him — the pictured eyes of Sid Tewksbury looked into his eyes. He flamed anew.

"There," he cried; "there, *that's* him, that's Ned Cutler!"

The detectives rushed forward. The crowd that gathered about the hotel gazed feverishly.

"That ain't Ned Cutler," cried someone; "that's Sid Tewksb'ry."

"Why, he's cashier in our bank," cried another, with great incredulity.

The detectives were losing no time. They were on their way to the bank.

"Sid Tewksb'ry?" echoed Thibeu blankly. "I don't know the name — *but that is his face!*"

"The bank? where is the bank?" demanded Gene. "We will see —"

"Mr. Sid Tewksbury?" a man behind the railing was answering William I. Brown, "Mr. Tewksbury hasn't come in yet."

"Oh, where does he live?"

"Well, you ought to know. Aren't you the man who came to Tewksbury's house last night after Ned Cutler?"

"W-h-e-w," Mr. Brown gave a long, soft whistle.

"Come on," said the other one, "let's go."

Coming out they met the Judge. He was hurrying anxiously ahead of Thibeu, Gene and their followers. "Where's Sid Tewksbury?" he asked hurriedly.

"Not here; we're going out to his house."

"Come," the Judge turned back with them. "I'll tell the landlord to hitch up my horse; ye'd better have something swift 'n' git there before anyone else does," jerk-

ing his head in the direction of Thibeau. "The easiest way out is gener'lly the best."

In response to their knocking Mrs. Tewksbury opened the door. They stepped inside.

"It's something more about that mis'able Ned Cutler, I s'pose!" she exclaimed at sight of them.

"Well, not altogether," was the answer. "We just want to speak to Mr. Sid Tewksbury for a moment."

"I ain't seen him this mornin'. He must a-got up early 'n' gone down t' the bank. I guess he was so upsot by the disgrace that good-fer-nothin' Cutler's brought onto us that he couldn't eat no breakfast. If ye want to see my son ye'll hev to go to the bank."

The detectives withdrew. "Skipped, I knew it," said Brown, who had given vent to that long-drawn, softly-whistled w-h-e-w when they were in the bank.

CHAPTER XLII

PAYING THE SCORE

THE drag net that was spread caught first Will, then Jen.

The true story of Tina's death was learned through them. The reason for the mysterious burying of the body was explained. "We'd been going with the girls for a long time on the sly," the shattered Will confessed. "We knew it would all come out if we went back to Merrence and told about Tina, and our folks would raise a row, so we — we put her under the snow."

Jen, weeping bitterly, told how the young men had been coming to see them — first at Thibeau's place, then to Millwell. "We knew they were swells," the poor girl's tears almost choked her utterance, "but we thought they were on the level — me and Tina did . . . we thought they were going to marry us . . . they didn't just say so . . . but they made us think they meant it . . . but they didn't hurt her . . . poor Tina . . . it was all over with her when she got thrown out of the sleigh."

Sid's father and mother, their most terrible fears allayed, seized the statements of Will and Jen with such relief that Sid's actual offenses seemed nothing compared with the thing which at first seemed possible.

Sid had been guilty of deception, but he had not committed a murderous crime. The knowledge that the ignominy, the opprobrium she had so unsparingly heaped upon Ned Cutler belonged to her own son had not yet penetrated Mrs. Ben's dazed consciousness with its full bitterness, but that knowledge had burst quickly and with great clearness upon all her acquaintances and friends.

With the unearthing of the facts of Tina's death, police

vigilance in the pursuit of Sid was relaxed. His mother began already to think of a shame-faced homecoming, a hushing up, a smoothing over of the worst facts. Perhaps Sid hadn't been so much to blame about the girl. She must have been a brazen creature who lured him on and led him into deceiving them.

Mr. and Mrs. Peabody were reticent. After the first shock of incredulous surprise had turned to a sickening certainty they drew within themselves, not discussing the matter outside their own home.

"How thankful we ought to be, Anson, that Emily isn't married to him, nor even *engaged*," Mrs. Peabody's tone was one of heartfelt gratitude.

"I guess," Mr. Peabody had answered in his slow, even way, "we've got a good deal to be grateful to Em'ly herself for. She must have 'sensed' that Sid wan't all right when none of the rest of us could see it."

"As for *Will*! — I don't know what his poor father and mother are going to *do* about that boy."

"I hear," said Mr. Peabody, as he put on his hat and coat, preparatory to going to the bank, "that that Ned Cutler has been doing pretty well while we all supposed he'd turned out a sort of scalawag. Judge Witherspoon tells me he's been studying civil engineering, and that he's getting along first rate — got to be sort of assistant engineer now."

"Dear me," ejaculated Mrs. Peabody, "you never can tell about how young folks are going to turn out, can you?"

Following close upon the heels of these disclosures came another sensation. An examination of the affairs of the bank disclosed the fact that Sid's accounts showed a discrepancy of nearly four thousand dollars.

Mr. Peabody himself conveyed this distressing news to Sid's parents. "Out of my respect for Mr. and Mrs. Tewksbury and my sympathy for them I'll inform them personally of this fresh trouble," he told the directors.

As considerately as he could Mr. Peabody broke his news.

"Of course," he concluded, "you know it'll be the duty of the directors of the bank to have Sid apprehended. His

bond, too, is forfeited — in fact, it won't much more than half cover his shortage. I needn't say, Mr. Tewksbury, and Mrs. Tewksbury, that this matter of Sid's double dealing has borne pretty heavily on me. I had the most absolute confidence in him — it has been mainly through my trust in him that he was given such a free rein at the bank."

Ben Tewksbury sat shaking and flabby in his big chair. "What we goin' to do, Mariar? — what we goin' to do?" he queried helplessly.

"I don't know, I don't know how we're ever goin' to live through it." Mrs. Ben, with pride broken, was weeping copious humble tears. "O' course, we'll pay as much o' the money as we kin, Ben, we got to do that."

"We'll be ruined," Ben answered with dull acquiescence, "what with the morgidge . . . 'n' payin' out on the lawsuit . . . 'n' now this . . . I don't know whut's goin' t' stand twixt us 'n' the county house." His chin sunk to his breast — he did not look up even when Mrs. Ben rose, with quivering lips and streaming eyes, to accompany Mr. Peabody to the door.

"It was ter'ble kind o' ye to come yerself, Mr. Peabody." She managed to control her voice to say this much, the words coming in tremulous jerks. "Ben 'n' me'll go down to see Jestice Withersp'n quick's we kin; we'll pay back the money if we k'in git enough to do it with. Mebbe, as Ben says, it'll ruin us, but we ain't goin' to let nobody be cheated out o' ther money through . . . through" . . . her lips hesitated and refused to speak the once proudly uttered name. A great sob shook her. Mr. Peabody hastened to fill in the pause of distress.

"Very well, Mrs. Tewksbury. Let me know as soon as you find out what you can do. Of course, if the deficit is made up, the directors I'm pretty sure won't press the charge very hard out of consideration for you and Mr. Tewksbury."

CHAPTER XLIII

DEBIT AND CREDIT

WITH Mrs. Cutler, Priscilla and Ned the tide of good fortune, which had in its ebb been carrying their ships away from them had turned and brought one after another back, till the little harbor of their lives seemed overflowing with bearers of rich cargo.

Ned had been cleared of all shadow of complicity in the case of Tina Thibeau. The story had reached the newspapers and sensational articles embellished by pictures of Sid and of Ned were given prominent space. These stories proved to be the wind that filled the sails of a ship of good fortune and sent it careering back to the Cutlers.

The newspaper article fell under the eye of the railroad president whose runaway horse Ned had stopped on that far-off morning in Boston and whom he had met again by chance on the station platform the day of his eventful trip to Merrence. A letter from him reached Ned with despatch. It offered a position as second engineer on a corps now surveying for the construction of a big line of railroad, with tenders of every assistance of which Ned would worthily avail himself in furthering his studies and bettering his position.

"It does seem," said Mrs. Cutler, tears of pride and joy stealing down her cheeks, "it does seem as if good things was jest pouring down onto us f'm above. I can't hardly b'lieve it all."

"And it's all come through the Judge," said Priscilla, turning glowing eyes upon him. "If it hadn't been for him and all his goodness, Ned couldn't have got a start at all."

"Oh, come — come," cried the Judge; "Ned had it in

'im; he'd a got there somehow. Don't let any o' yer go-to-meetin' friends hear ye callin' me *good* 'er they'll think yer goin' over to the devil," he added with his jovial laugh.

"I don't care what they think," Priscilla replied with spirit, "and I don't care what they *say*," she persisted, with a furious blush; "I want you to know, Judge, that *we* think there's *nobody* that's any more *true and good* than you are."

The Judge gazed at her an instant in pleased irresolution, then leaning over as he sat in his chair to where she sat in hers, he took her hand with slow care in his big palm. "Priscilla," he said, "I ain't ever put out to sea flyin' false colors. Any little thing I've done fer any of ye I ain't done out of Christian spirit of doin' good — not enough anyway fer me to get puffed up about. No, I'm goin' to own up, I've done it mostly fer *you*."

"For *me* . . . why, Judge . . . I thought . . . it was because you wanted to help Ned, wasn't it?"

"Well, I wanted to help Ned, of course . . . Ned's a nice boy . . . but I wanted to help him mor'n anything else, I guess, 'cause he was your brother . . . I've always had a sort of sneakin' liking fer ye, Priscilla, but I never told ye. I ain't tellin' ye now as fer as *that* goes. I *mean* — with any idee of askin' ye to *hev* me — 'cause I don't want t' embarrass ye by hevin' to give me the mitten. I know you've been brought up with churchgoers 'n' professin' members that hev been lookin at me on the bias fer a good many years, and I know the' ain't any use fer such an all-fired, dyed-in-the-wool, bald-headed old sinner askin' ye t' let him be anything mor'n a friend to ye, jest a good solid *friend*."

Priscilla was blushing and smiling. "Justice, how do we know anything is no use if we don't try?"

"Great Jehosephat! ye don't mean to intimate that you'd *hev* me?"

"Judge Witherspoon, who knows what they *might* do untill they're asked?"

"Well, well, well! See here, Priscilla, I ask ye plump, now

don't be afraid to say 'no' if ye'd ruther — Will ye marry this miser'ble reprobate?"

"Justice Witherspoon, *I will.*"

"I'm going to bind that with a smack, right here before your ma 'n' Ned . . . but no, I'm afraid it won't do; you wouldn't be happy, Priscilla; I'd be sneakin' off every now 'n' then to a hoss race, er theatre, er somethin'—"

"You needn't sneak, Judge, you can take me with you —"

"Priscilla, do you mean it?"

"Of course I do. If going to them has made you such a sinner as you are, I want to be made just the same kind of a one."

"Priscilla, you'll spile me! — but I'll tell ye what; I ain't going to let ye git the best of me. I'll go to church and Sunday school — yes, by thunder — *Sunday school* with *you!* I guess it won't make me any wuss t' go where they turn out such folks as you 'n' yer Ma be."

The foregoing little episode was being enacted in the parlor of the Putnam House, which was still sheltering the Cutler family. At this instant the door opened and Joel Putnam appeared.

"Ben Tewksb'ry's downstairs, Jedge, 'n' Mis' Tewksb'ry. They want t' see ye, pertickler business, Ben sais."

"Tell 'em to go to my office, I'll be right down there; 'business before pleasure, Priscilla,'" he went on as the landlord disappeared from view, "and say, Priscilla, this ain't a dream, I ain't walkin' in my sleep — am I? is it real?"

Priscilla laughed a little, happily, as she put her hand in his outstretched one. "It's *real*, Judge."

Mrs. Cutler here came forward. "I've been too s'prised t' know *whut* to say, Jedge, but I b'lieve I'm the happiest woman in the Corners to-day, twixt Ned, 'n' Priscilla 'n' you."

Ned, happy, and yet the Judge divined, not quite at rest in his mind about something, came forward and grasped the Judge by the hand. "Judge," he said, "Priscilla's struck luck, and I guess you have too," then, hesitatingly, "Judge,

after Uncle Ben goes, I'd like to see you for a few minutes."

"All right, my boy, come down to the office." He's going to tell me what took him to Merrence Thanksgiving night, was the Judge's shrewd guess as he left them and went down to meet the Ben Tewksburys.

When the Judge entered his office he found Mr. and Mrs. Tewksbury seated there. The door had been unlocked, as was its habit. Ben held a letter in his hand. No one spoke for an instant after the Judge came in, then Ben said:

"We just got this letter . . . it's about the lane . . . court has decided that las' verdick must hold."

"Equal division?" said the Justice. "Of course, that's the only thing *could* hold."

No more was said, though the thoughts of all ran back to the Judge's counsel before the suit was begun. Ben involuntarily sighed, a heavy sigh, pregnant with many mingled feelings.

It was Mrs. Ben who first took courage to broach the main object of their visit.

"We came, Jestice," she said in a trembling voice and meekly conciliatory manner, "to go over the morgidges, 'n' the bond I give to the bank fer — fer Sid — 'n' what we owe the lawyers, 'n' find out jest how much prop'ty value we got left. We want to know how much we kin pay toward the — the money we got to pay to the bank."

The Judge was silent for an instant. Then, "There's a shortage at the bank?"

Mrs. Ben could only nod her head, her handkerchief to her eyes.

"Yes," said Ben, sighing again heavily. "Nigh onto four thousand . . . I don't know as we kin meet it."

A careful examination of the Tewksbury's pecuniary affairs revealed the fact that by putting a third mortgage on the homestead and farm to its full value and turning over the property given as bond by Mrs. Tewksbury, they

would lack some six hundred dollars of being able to make good Sid's deficit.

"I don't know what we're goin' to do, Mariar," Ben exclaimed helplessly.

Mrs. Ben could only silently weep.

The Judge's eyes swept the forlorn, hopeless figures. "If you have a mind to leave it with me," he said, "I'll fix it up for you. I hold the other mortgages and I'll take the third. I'll make it enough to cover the six hundred, and ye needn't worry but what ye can stay on the place as long as ye live."

"Oh, Jedge, we don't know how we kin thank ye —" Mrs. Ben was almost overcome with gratitude.

"Ye needn't thank me; thank Priscilla."

"*Priscilla*, Jedge?"

"Priscilla's goin' t' be *Mrs.* Judge; what I'm doin' is fer her sake, 'cause I know she'd like to hev me do all I can fer you 'n' her Uncle Dan'l, too. So if I'm easy with ye all ye kin git down on yer marrow bones 'n' thank *her*."

The door opened before the dumbfounded Mrs. Tewksbury could make any reply and Daniel Tewksbury came in with a letter in his hand. He hesitated, seemed about to retreat, then came in and closed the door.

He took in the stricken face and figure of Maria, that face and form once so dominant and aggressive; Ben's broken look, his inert, flabby frame, his hollow eyes, his wan visage.

Ben's dull eyes rested on his brother's stooping shoulders, his fast-whitening hair, his thin, tremulous hands.

"How d'ye, Dan'l," he said slowly, in a strangely subdued voice.

"How de, Ben," Dan'l answered. Then, "How be ye, Mariar?"

"How be ye, Dan'l?"

"I've jest heerd, Jedge, 't court decision is sustained," said Daniel, slowly holding up the letter in his hand. "The lane must be ekally divided; I s'pose Ben's heerd."

“ Yes, Dan’l,” it was Ben who answered ; “ the lane must be ekally divided.”

“ I wouldn’t wonder if that was the way father meant fer it to be, Ben.”

“ I wouldn’t wonder after all if *’twas*, Dan’l.”

CHAPTER XLIV

SOME AFFAIRS SETTLED

THE deficit in Sid's accounts having been made good the bank officials allowed the matter to drop and no effort was made to find him.

Whither he went, what driftwood on the sea of life he became, none ever knew.

Mr. Peabody withdrew from an active position in the bank, arranging his affairs so that he, accompanied by Mrs. Peabody and Emily, might make a year's stay abroad.

Ned had confided to the Judge the fact of his and Emily's marriage and his breach of faith had been forgiven.

"On one condition, Ned," the Justice had sternly demanded. "You stick to your work and let Emily go away with her folks."

Both Emily and Ned had agreed to this and that hasty morning marriage remained a secret, though shared, greatly to their relief, by so stanch a friend as Judge Witherspoon.

Before the departure of the Peabodys and before Ned's going to take his new position, the Judge and Priscilla were quietly married.

"But I don't believe it ever would have happened," said Priscilla to the Judge after the ceremony was over, laughing and blushing as she spoke, "if I hadn't just about told you plump and plain that I wanted you to marry me."

"Like as not, like as not," the Judge answered with his big, hearty laugh, "and I'd a-gone to my grave hankerin' after ye."

"You wan't so fur wrong, Mis' Pettigrew," said Mrs. Tibbits, "when ye said the Jedge was gittin' love er religion, a-goin' to that s'prise party at Ben Tewksb'ry's."

"I knew 't must be one er t'other 'n' I'd a bet on its

not bein' religion," laughed Mrs. Pettigrew. "The on'y diffickwilty was in pickin' out the one he was taggin' after. I own up I *missed* my guess *this* time; I thought he was soft on Em'ly Peabody."

"I don't know *why* we never onct thought o' Priscilla," exclaimed Miss Fitch. "I s'pose it was because we'd all got her set down fer an old maid. Well, I'm reel glad she's done so well, 'n' I don't begretch her *one bit* her good luck in ketchin' the Jestice."

"She *suttinly* hes set herself into the butter tub," said Mrs. Pettigrew with unusual gravity.

"I should say she *hes*," Mrs. Tibbitts chimed in with enthusiasm. "Jedge Withersp'n's the biggest ketch in putty nigh the hull county."

CHAPTER XLV

BLOOM TIME AGAIN

WHEN the spring came, just before the leaf buds began to burst into green upon the trees up and down the length of Lilac Lane, two men with stooping shoulders and uncertain steps, walked slowly along the lane, bearing a burden between them.

When they reached the place where the three old lilac trees had been hewn, they placed their burden of three young lilac trees upon the ground.

And then they dug . . . and together they planted the young lilac bushes where the old lilac trees had been cut down.

When they had finished they stood up and surveyed their work. Then they gazed reflectively up and down the length of the lane.

"I don't see, Dan'l, why it ain't best t' leave it as it's allus been, 'n' both of us use it."

"Why, yes, Ben, seems t' me, too, we'd best leave it as 'tis; as you say, both on us kin use it."

CHAPTER XLVI

FRUITION

THE last bolt had been driven. The last rivet had been fastened.

A great bridge spanned the wide, deep, rushing river, a thing of strength, of symmetry,—a poem in mathematics.

The engineer-in-chief stood looking long in silence at his completed work—then he turned to the little woman standing at his side.

“Well, Emmy, how is it?”

“It’s great, Ned; it’s splendid, and how much it means. If it could only speak. It’s the actual embodiment of all your efforts, your hopes and your ambitions.”

“Things have turned out pretty well for us after all, Emmy. Better than we thought they ever would that day I cut our initials on the lilac tree—you remember?”

THE END.



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